

“ DANTE ”

“ MONARCHY ”

and

THREE POLITICAL LETTERS ”

with an Introduction by

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*and a Note on
the Chronology of Dante's
Political Works by*

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INTRODUCTION

THE reason for offering a new translation of Dante's *Monarchy* may be briefly stated. It is that students of political philosophy often meet references to this work, either in their lectures or in their reading, yet are unable to study it for themselves because they do not read Latin and previous English translations are not easily available.¹ Such students, it is believed, will find the present translation useful. The notes to the text and the chronology of events were also drawn up with them in mind; hence their brevity, for any attempt to provide an exhaustive commentary upon the text would mean writing a history of medieval politics and philosophy. The needs of those who read Latin have been admirably met by Signor Vinay in his recent edition of the *Monarchy*, where he provides references to Dante's other works, to the writings of contemporaries and to the sources of Dante's thought. The text of Vinay's edition has been followed throughout.²

In writing the introduction to a work of political philosophy there is a temptation to attribute more importance to the work in question than it can properly claim. With Dante's *Monarchy* this temptation scarcely arises; for many have dismissed the treatise as a dream, the vision of an idealist out of touch with political realities who was yearning for an Empire that had passed away. And these summary judgments are not entirely without substance, even after we have drawn attention to the points that they neglect: the

¹ See Bibliography.

² The Vulgate text has been used for quotations from scripture.

point, for example, that many of the most highly gifted of Dante's contemporaries also took the Empire as their ideal;¹ that it was, in fact, Henry VII's effort to make the Empire a reality that touched off the vision of Empire in Dante's mind; and that later generations are notoriously skilful at distinguishing political dreams from political realities in the past.

We can now see that both the facts and the opinions of the late thirteenth century were heavily weighted against the Empire and in favour of national monarchies. The Emperor, after 1250, was too dependent upon his electors and the schemes of German princes and Italian cities to exercise any sustained control over them. Meanwhile efficient monarchs, more powerful than the Emperor, had established themselves in France, England, Aragon—and even, to some extent, Naples. These monarchs were in no mood to accept the archaic pretensions of the Empire, and they had behind them political thinkers fashioning the theories upon which the sovereign state of modern times was to be built.² But it was not only the publicists of Philip the Fair and Robert of Naples who treated the Empire as an anachronism; St. Thomas Aquinas (and his continuator, Ptolemy of Lucca) did not so much as deign to mention the Empire in his political work.³ The Papacy itself, which had for so long shared the burden of power with the Emperors, now accepted the national monarch as its true interlocutor in the dialogue of Church and State.⁴

The *Monarchy* must not be regarded as Dante's last word on politics. It has lately been shown by Professor D'Entrèves⁵ that the *Monarchy* is no more than one stage in the development of Dante's political conceptions, and

¹ E.g. Alexander of Roes and Engelbert of Admont, referred to in the Chronological Table.

² Cf. W. Ullmann, 'The Development of the Medieval Idea of Sovereignty', *English Historical Review*, January 1949.

³ See Aquinas, *De Regimine Principum*.

⁴ Ullmann, loc. cit.

⁵ A. P. D'Entrèves, *Dante as a Political Thinker* (Oxford, 1952).

that to trace that development is impossible without a detailed study of the *Convivio*, the political letters¹ and the symbolism of the *Divina Commedia*. The inclusion in this volume of the three political letters that bear most closely on *Monarchy* will enable the reader to use it as a starting-point for such an inquiry.

Ultimately the value of *Monarchy* is the insight it allows into the workings of a great mind at the very moment² it became seized of a great ideal. And the hope of a stable, peace-making government was a great ideal. It had been an influence on European history since the beginnings of Europe, in the Empire of Constantine, of Charlemagne, and of the German Emperors.³ After taking many forms and being centred in very different courts, it seemed to have returned, a few years before Dante's birth, to its original centre in the Roman people.⁴

No matter what meaning we attach to the term 'Roman people' in the *Monarchy*, whether it refers to the citizens of Rome or to the Italian people, there can be no question that Dante regarded the mission of Rome in world history as providential. The Romans were a chosen people, just as the Jews were a chosen people. Did God not perform miracles for the Romans as He did for the Jews? Did He not speak through the Sibyl as well as through the Prophets? In which case those who refused to obey the Roman Emperor were refusing to accept the Will of God. 'Insanity', 'madness', 'barbarism', these are some of the terms used by Dante to describe such behaviour in the almost hysterical letter directed against the Florentines who were resisting Henry VII.⁵ And Henry VII himself he addressed in words

¹ Cf. the Chronological Table and Three Political Letters.

² The dating of the *Monarchy* is a very thorny question; see the Note at the end of this volume.

³ Cf. R. Folz, *L'Idée d'Empire en Occident de V^e au XIV^e Siècle* (Paris, 1953).

⁴ Cf. Folz, op. cit., pp. 136-45.

⁵ Letter to the Florentines within the City (1311), Letter VI, p. 103.

first spoken to the Christ: 'Behold the Lamb of God! Behold Him who taketh away the sins of the world.'¹ Such was the pitch of Dante's anxiety and hope at the time when he was writing the *Monarchy*; his passion had quickened an image of the Empire's role in human history which had gone dead beneath the pens of lesser men. In this sense we may justly claim that Dante's work is a culmination, expressing what lesser men had been struggling to say for centuries.

In a further respect Dante was speaking on behalf of others: in his attack upon the pretensions of the extreme Papalists. It should hardly be necessary at this date to emphasize that he was not attacking the spiritual supremacy of the Papacy, and that his criticisms arise out of his burning concern for the purity of the See of Peter. Promiscuity, the opposite of purity, means mixing together things that should of their nature be kept separate; and it was this promiscuity of the contemporary Popes which Dante castigated. They were mixing in temporal concerns for which God had ordained temporal princes. This was particularly true of the canon lawyers enlisted by the Papacy to undermine the rights of the Emperor. And the fiercer the battle between the Emperors and the Popes the more ambitious grew the claims made for the Papacy by the commentators on the canon law, the decretalists. There was a vicious circle in operation: the decretalists attributing ever greater power to the institution from which they sought promotion, and the Papacy using the decretalists' teaching to justify its claims.² The situation became intolerable to many, including Dante, when a most unrelenting canonist, Boniface VIII, held the See of Peter. Moreover, there was a clash between Dante and Boniface in the hurly-burly of practical politics, for Boniface meddled in the internal affairs of Florence. He favoured the Black Guelf, Corso Donati, whose party

¹ Letter to Henry VII (1311), Letter VII, p. 111.

² Cf. Ullmann, *Medieval Papalism* (London, 1949), *passim*.

eventually drove the White Guelfs, Dante amongst them, into exile. No wonder that Dante's hatred for Boniface can be heard so distinctly in many passages of the *Monarchy*, or that so many of his arguments are direct replies to those of Boniface.

Yet the fact that he had expressed the providential mission of the Empire so powerfully, and had effectively stated the case against the extreme Papalists, does not account for Dante's conviction that he was doing something unprecedented. These arguments had the backing of tradition, and he was simply shaping them anew. The originality on which he lays so much stress is to be found in his specifically philosophical justification for there being one ruler over all mankind. Invoking the philosophical concept of the 'possible intellect' he asserts that the specific task of mankind as a whole is to actualize all the potentialities of this intellect; he further maintains that this can only be achieved when there is one world-government directing the process.¹ His conclusion seems to have a modern ring about it, and there is much to support the suggestion that Dante's view of mankind's proper task 'is really the first known expression of the modern idea of Humanity', that 'the conception of Humanity first presented itself to the European consciousness merely as a secularized imitation of the religious notion of a Church.'² One need go no further to discover the grounds of Dante's originality.

Nor need we search further to learn why the *Monarchy* was so bitterly attacked by theologians, since Dante himself, in the passage referred to, indicates his indebtedness to Averroes on the question of the possible intellect. Now Averroes' teaching had long been the target of the scholastics' criticism, because if there is only one single intellect for all mankind then personal immortality is impossible; and a fundamental dogma of Christianity is denied. In the

¹ Cf. pp. 7-9.

² E. Gilson, *Dante the Philosopher* (London, 1948), p. 179.

light of Dante's other writings it would, of course, be absurd to maintain that he did not believe in personal immortality. All the same, if this passage is taken literally we can well understand the wrath it occasioned in Guido Vernani.

Guido Vernani was a Dominican scholar who in 1327 wrote a reply to the *Monarchy* called *De Reprobatione Monarchiae* in which he accused Dante of Averroism. This treatise was inspired by Pope John XXII, who was searching for answers to the Imperialist propaganda of Lewis of Bavaria. The Pope must have feared the influence of Dante's work, since in 1329 he had the *Monarchy* burnt as heretical in the market-place at Bologna; there were even some who proposed to dig up Dante's bones and burn them. Yet the work continued to exercise its influence in devious ways. Through Henry VII's brother, Baldwin, Archbishop of Trier, it played a part in the preparation of the Golden Bull issued by the Emperor Charles IV (1356);¹ through the tutor and Chancellor of Charles V, Gattinara, its teaching was remembered in the sixteenth century²—so much so that it was placed upon the Index in 1554. But after its removal from the Index in the nineteenth century it ceased to be the monopoly of Protestants and anti-clericals. The wheel came full circle in 1921 when a Papal Encyclical was issued in praise of Dante's works.

Although Mr. Colin Hardie and I are independently responsible for the sections of this volume appearing under our own names, there has been a good deal of consultation throughout. In this consultation I have been by far the greater debtor.

DONALD NICHOLL

¹ Vezin, *Dante* (Dülmén, 1949), pp. 307–8.

² *ibid.*

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

1245 Pope Innocent IV deposes Emperor Frederick II at Council of Lyons.

1250 December 13. Death of Frederick II. This date marks the collapse of the Hohenstaufen, for Frederick's legitimate son, Conrad, died soon afterwards (1254).

1257 One section of the Electors chooses Richard of Cornwall, brother of the King of England, as a candidate for the Empire; another section chooses Alfonso X of Castile. Neither of the rival candidates is able to make good his claims.

1258 Manfred, illegitimate son of Frederick II, has himself crowned King of Sicily.

1260 The forces of Siena, a Ghibbeline-dominated commune, defeat the Florentines at Montaperti. The Guelf party (possibly including Dante's father) is driven into exile. For the next six years Florence is governed by Manfred's representative lieutenant.

1263 June 28. Charles of Anjou receives Sicily from Pope Urban IV (1261-4).

✓ 1265 Dante born, in Florence.
June 21. Pope Clement IV (1265-8), fearing that Manfred might secure a hold over Italy, calls in Charles of Anjou and invests him with Naples and Sicily.

1266 The Guelf exiles from Florence and Siena, at the Pope's request, finance the campaign of Charles of Anjou against Manfred.

February 26. Charles defeats and kills Manfred at

Benevento. This victory enables the Florentine Guelfs to secure control of Florence once more, and to drive out the Ghibbelines; it also opens up Sicily to Florentine commercial enterprise and strengthens the alliance between the Papacy and the Florentine bankers.

1268 Conradin, son of Conrad, tries to assert his claim to Sicily but is defeated by Charles of Anjou at the battle of Tagliacozzo (August 23) and beheaded at Naples (October 29).

1273 End of Interregnum: Rudolph of Hapsburg is elected King of the Romans and is recognized by Pope Gregory X (1271-6).

1274 2nd Council of Lyons (14th Oecumenical Council).

1279 Rudolph of Hapsburg abandons suzerainty over Romagna to the Pope and recognizes that he holds his office from the Pope.

1281 The French Pope Martin V (1281-5) threatens to turn the Papacy into an entirely French institution. It was partly through fear of this that Alexander of Roes (a canon of Cologne now serving Cardinal James Colonna in Italy) wrote his *Memorale de Prerogativa Imperii Romani*, a defence of the Empire in its German setting.

1282 March 30. The 'Sicilian Vespers', when the people of Palermo rise and massacre the French. Henceforth Sicily is divided into Naples, ruled by the French house of Anjou, and Sicily, ruled by Peter III of Aragon.

June. In Florence a peaceful revolution takes place; the government is placed in the hands of the Priors of the Guilds and the Captain of the people; the Priors' term of office is fixed at two months.

1284 The Pope deposes Peter of Aragon; Charles of Valois, second son of Philip III of France, is proclaimed King of Sicily—ineffectually.

1285 Charles of Anjou dies, and is succeeded in Naples by his son, Charles II (1285-1309).
 Death of Philip III of France, succeeded by his son, Philip the Fair (1285-1314).

1287 German National Council at Würzburg. The fear is expressed that the Empire is to be divided. As a result Alexander of Roes in the following year reaffirms the German tradition in his *Noticia Saeculi*.

1289 June 11. Battle of Campaldino; the Florentines, at the head of a coalition of Guelf cities and supported by mercenaries of Charles II of Naples, defeat the Tuscan Ghibbelines. In the Florentine contingent was Dante.

1290 June. Death of Beatrice.

1291 Fall of Acre; end of Christian crusading kingdoms.

1292 Dante writes *Vita Nuova*.
Adolf of Nassau elected King of the Romans by German electors.

1293 In Florence the Ordinances of Justice, excluding from the government the landowners, mostly Ghibbeline, who had been monopolizing power since the battle of Campaldino.

1294 July. Pope Celestine V elected; abdicates in December. Pope Boniface VIII elected (1294-1303).

1295 Dante, having enrolled himself in the Guild of Physicians and Apothecaries, enters political life. From November till April of the following year he is a member of the Special Council of the Captain. (His policy seems to have been to secure internal peace for Florence by opposing extremists and excluding foreign powers from interfering in Florence. It is now that the city begins to split into 'Whites' and 'Blacks'; the Whites include the moderate merchants and those who accept the Ordinances of Justice; the Blacks are composed of aristocratic bankers and

discontented landowners led by Corso Donati, in close collaboration with Pope Boniface VIII.)

1296 Boniface VIII issues Bull *Clericis Laicos* forbidding ecclesiastics to pay taxes to temporal powers; this prohibition is subsequently modified for France after protests by Philip the Fair and the Florentine bankers—whose operations were threatened by Philip's counter-measures to the Bull.

1298 Adolf of Nassau killed; Albert of Austria elected King of the Romans.

1299 Alliance between Albert of Austria and Philip the Fair.

1300 Boniface VIII proclaims a Jubilee Year. Dante was almost certainly one of those who made the pilgrimage to Rome.

April. Three citizens of Florence—Black Guelfs—banished for conspiring against the freedom of their city. They were Boniface's bankers, and in consequence he fulminated against the sentence.

June 15–August 15. Dante is one of the six Priors. The Priors confirm the sentences against the Blacks and, for parity, also banish Guido Cavalcanti, Dante's best friend but a factious White.

✓ 1301 Boniface negotiates with Charles of Valois, brother of Philip the Fair, to bring troops into Italy to pacify the country.

June 19. Twice in one day Dante opposes the Pope's request for Florentine troops to aid his forces in Tuscany.

October. Charles of Valois, having been commissioned by the Pope to restore peace in Tuscany, joins forces with the Black exiles in Tuscany. An embassy is despatched from Florence to the Pope to try to keep Charles out. Dante is one of the ambassadors.

November 1. Charles of Valois enters Florence; the Blacks seize control. Dante hears of his ruin while

still on the unsuccessful embassy to Rome. Henceforth, until his death, he is an exile.

December 5. Boniface directs the Bull *Auscula Fili* against Philip the Fair.

1302 April. By the end of this month all the leading Whites and their followers (some six hundred in number) have been driven from Florence. Charles of Valois leaves Florence for Sicily.

November. Boniface issues the Bull *Unam Sanctam*, the classic assertion of the supremacy of the spiritual over the temporal power. 

1303 March 24. Philip the Fair appeals for a General Council against Boniface.

April. Albert of Austria abandons his alliance with France; recognized as Emperor by Boniface, he promises 'fealty and obedience' to the Papacy on the part of the Empire. It becomes known that Boniface intends to excommunicate Philip on September 8; therefore on September 7, Nogaret, Colonna and other agents of Philip seize Boniface and hold him prisoner at Anagni. Two days later the citizens of Anagni drive out the kidnappers.

October 12. Death of Boniface.

October 22. Election of Benedict XI (dies July 1304).

1304 Letter I written by Dante on behalf of the exiled Whites.

Dante abandons the 'unpious crew' of the exiled Whites and 'makes a party by himself' (*Par. xvii 62-9*).

July 20. Failure of attempted *coup de main* by exiled Whites on Florence at La Lastra.

1304-8 Dante's wanderings through 'almost all the parts of Italy' (*Conv. I. iii*).

1305 June. A Frenchman elected Pope, taking the title of Clement V (1305-14). After residing in various parts of France he establishes himself at Avignon (1309).

1308 Death of Albert of Hapsburg. The attempt of Charles of Valois to become Emperor fails. Instead the Electors, backed by Clement V, choose Henry of Luxemburg, who becomes Henry VII (1308-13). The treatise *De Ortu, Progressu et Fine Romani Imperii* by Engelbert, Abbot of Admont, a Cistercian abbey in Styria. *Convivio* left unfinished (four books out of fifteen: IV discusses the authority of the Philosopher, Aristotle, and of the Emperor, before Henry VII's election—IV. iii. 7). *De Vulgari Eloquenteria* left unfinished.

1309 January 6. Henry VII crowned at Aix-la-Chapelle.

1309-13 Preparation and composition of the *Monarchy*.

1310 October. Henry VII, with the approbation of the Pope, sets off for Rome to restore peace in Italy. Dante addresses a letter to the princes and peoples of Italy, calling upon them to welcome the peace-bringer, Henry (Letter V).

1311 January. Henry crowned at Milan.

March 31. Dante addresses a violent letter to 'the Florentines within the City', who were refusing homage to Henry (Letter VI).

April 16. Dante addresses a letter to Henry, urging him to advance more rapidly (Letter VII).

September. The Florentines banish Dante from the City for ever.

1312 King Robert of Naples heads the opposition to Henry. Neapolitan troops, occupying part of Rome, prevent Henry from being crowned in St. Peter's. Instead, Henry is crowned on June 29 in the Lateran Basilica. A few days later he receives news of Clement's Bull declaring a truce. This first open move against Henry by the Pope was partly due to the fact that the Pope was suzerain of Naples.

September. Henry moves back into Tuscany, attacks Florence unsuccessfully and winters there.

1313 April 26. Henry declares Robert guilty of high treason and at the same time proclaims that every soul should be subject to the Roman Emperor.

June 13. Clement issues the Bull *Pastoralis Cura*, denying the Emperor's all-embracing claim to lordship and threatening excommunication for anyone attacking Robert of Naples.

August 24. Henry dies at Buonconvento on the march towards Naples; at the subsequent Imperial election neither of the candidates commands undivided allegiance.

1314 Deaths of Clement V and Philip the Fair. Dante's letter to the Italian Cardinals (Letter VIII).

After 1314 Dante at work on the *Divina Commedia*, which he completes shortly before his death at Ravenna on September 14, 1321.

For a further discussion of the chronology of Dante's works reference should be made to the Note at the end of this volume.

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MONARCHY

BOOK ONE

I

ALL men whom the higher Nature ¹ has imbued with a love of truth should feel impelled to work for the benefit of future generations, whom they will thereby enrich just as they themselves have been enriched by the labours of their ancestors. Let there be no doubt in the mind of the man who has benefited from the common heritage but does not trouble to contribute to the common good that he is failing sadly in his duty. For he is not 'a tree beside the running waters bearing fruit in due season' ² but rather a vicious whirlpool, for ever swallowing things but never throwing them up again. Since I have often reflected much on this matter and have been afraid that I might one day be held guilty of burying my talents,³ I desire not simply to blossom but to bear fruit for the public good, by demonstrating truths that no-one else has considered. For what fruit would a man bear if he were merely to prove once again some theorem of Euclid,⁴ or to demonstrate for the second time the nature of happiness, which Aristotle has already done? ⁵ Or to undertake an apologia for old age of the sort that Cicero has produced? ⁶ None whatever. Such a wearisome and superfluous undertaking would simply provoke disgust.

Now since the truth about temporal monarchy is the

¹ i.e. God.

² Ps. i. 3.

³ Matt. xxv. 14 onwards.

⁴ The *Elements of Euclid*.

⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*.

⁶ Cicero, *De Senectute*.

most beneficial yet most neglected of all these other beneficial but obscure truths, and yet has been neglected by all because it leads to no immediate reward,¹ I intend to draw it out of the shadows into the light. There I shall be able to examine it for the benefit of the world, and to my own glory gain the palm of so great an enterprise. This is an arduous task, and one beyond my strength, yet in addressing myself to it I am trusting not in my own talents, but in the illumination of the Giver 'who gives to all liberally and upbraids none'.²

II

Therefore we must first consider the meaning of 'temporal monarchy', what its essence is and what its end. The temporal monarchy that is called the Empire³ is a single Command exercised over all persons in time, or at least in those matters which are subject to time.⁴ Doubts about temporal monarchy give rise to three principal questions. The first is the question whether it is necessary for the well-being of the world. The second is whether it was by right that the Roman people took upon itself the office of the Monarch. And thirdly, there is the question whether the Monarch's authority is derived directly from God or from some vicar or minister of God.

Now every truth that is not itself a first principle must be demonstrated by means of some truth that is a first principle. Therefore in any inquiry it is a prerequisite to have a full understanding of that principle which under

¹ As in many other passages of the *Monarchy* the overtones here are unmistakable. Dante is referring to those Papal and Imperial publicists who defended the Papacy and the Empire out of a desire for promotion.

² Jas. i. 5.

³ Here Dante seems to be distinguishing between 'Monarchia' (a philosophical concept: the rule of one person) and 'Imperium' (a historical institution in which the rule of one person is a given fact).

⁴ As opposed to eternal concerns.

analysis we see to guarantee the certainty of all the other propositions which are deduced from it. So the present treatise being a sort of speculative inquiry, we must begin by examining that principle which will be the basis for all our subsequent reasoning. Now it is to be noted that there are some subjects that are completely outside human control, about which we can only speculate, being unable to affect them by our actions; such are mathematics, physics and revealed truth. There are others, however, that fall within our control; not only can we speculate about them, but also we can do something about them. In these, action is not subordinate to speculation but speculation is for the sake of action, because the aim in such matters is action. Since the present subject is political ¹—indeed, the source and principle of all just governments—and anything political lies within our power, it is obvious that the matter in hand is not primarily directed towards speculation but towards action. Again, since in practical affairs the ultimate end is the principle and cause of all that is done (the end being the original motive of the agent), it follows that the formulation of means is derived from the end in view: thus wood is shaped in one way to build a house and in another way to build a ship. Similarly if the whole process of human society ² has an end, then this end can serve as the principle by which to demonstrate the validity of our subsequent argument. It would be absurd to suppose that this or that society has an end without acknowledging that there is one end common to them all.

III

Therefore let us see what is the ultimate end of human society as a whole; once that is grasped our task is more

¹ 'Politics' here is used in a much broader sense than is customary in the twentieth century. It includes all the activities for the orderly government of human society.

² For the meaning of 'universalis civitas humani generis' cf. D'Entrèves, *Dante as a Political Thinker*, pp. 47-8.

than half accomplished, as the Philosopher¹ says in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

In order to clarify the issue it may be noted that nature forms the thumb for one end and the whole hand for another, and the arm for yet another, whilst each of these ends is different from that to which the whole man is destined. Similarly the end towards which the individual's life is directed is different from that of the family community; the village has one end, the city another and the kingdom yet another; and last of all there is the end that the eternal God has established for the whole human race by means of nature, which is the mode of his art. It is this last-mentioned end that we are looking for and that will be the guiding principle in our inquiry.

The first point to realize is that 'God and nature never do anything in vain', for whatever is brought into existence has some purpose to serve. Yet it is not the being of any creature but its proper function that is the ultimate end of the Creator in creating, and so the proper function is not instituted for the sake of the creature but the latter is created to serve its proper function. From this it follows that there must be some particular function proper to the human species as whole and for which the whole species in its multitudinous variety was created; this function is beyond the capacity of any one man or household or village, or even of any one city or kingdom. What this function is will become clear once the specific capacity of mankind as a whole is evident.

I say therefore that no property that is common to beings of different species represents the specific capacity of any one of them; because, since its ultimate capacity is what

¹ The Philosopher is Aristotle, who acquired this title in the Middle Ages because it was commonly held that he had come as close to ultimate truth as was possible for any human being unaided by divine Revelation. The passage of the *Nicomachean Ethics* is Book I. 8.

constitutes each species, it would follow that one being would be specifically constituted by several specifying factors—which is impossible. And so the specific capacity of man does not consist simply in *being*, since the very elements also share in being: nor does it consist in *compound being*, for this is also found in the minerals; nor in *animate being*, which the plants also enjoy; nor in the capacity to apprehend things, for this is shared by brute animals, but it consists in the capacity to apprehend by means of the *possible intellect*,¹ and it is this that sets man apart both from inferior and from superior beings. For although there are other beings endowed with intellect, their intellect is not *possible* like that of man, since such beings are completely intellectual; in them intellect and being coincide, and their very *raison d'être* is to perform intellectual operations without pause, otherwise they would not be eternal. From which it is evident that the specific capacity of mankind is an intellectual capacity or potentiality. And because that potentiality cannot wholly and at once be translated into action by one man, or by any one of the particular communities listed above, mankind has to be composed of a multitude through which this entire potentiality can be actualized. Similarly there needs to be a multitude of things which can be generated from prime matter if the entire potency of that matter is to be brought into action all the time. The alternative is for potentiality to exist separately; this is impossible. Averroes agrees with this opinion in his commentary on the *De Anima*.²

¹ The meaning of *possible intellect* is best seen by contrasting it with the intellects of the angels, who are the beings referred to in the next sentence. For whereas an angelic intellect is perpetually acting to the fullest extent of its powers, individual human beings do not necessarily achieve this intellectual plenitude. Hence the human being's is a *possible* intellect.

² Averroes (1126-98) was an Arabic philosopher whose commentaries on Aristotle greatly influenced medieval thinkers. Since Averroes' doctrine of the possible intellect involves denial of

This intellectual power of which I am speaking not only deals with universal forms or species but also extends to particulars. Hence it is commonly said that the speculative intellect becomes practical by extension,¹ and is thereby directed towards action and making things. I am referring to action as governed by the virtue of political prudence, and to the making of things as governed by art. But both are subordinate to speculation as the highest function for the sake of which the Supreme Goodness brought mankind into being.

From all this one begins to appreciate what is meant in the *Politics* by the sentence: 'Men of superior intellect naturally rule over others.'²

IV

Thus it is quite clear that the task proper to mankind considered as a whole is to fulfil the total capacity of the possible intellect all the time, primarily by speculation and secondarily, as a function and extension of speculation, by action. Now since what applies to the part applies also to the whole, and since the individual man becomes perfect in wisdom and prudence through sitting in quietude,³ so it is in the quietude or tranquillity of peace that mankind finds the best conditions for fulfilling its proper task (almost a divine task, as we learn from the statement: 'Thou hast

individual immortality, Dante, by quoting him here, is laying himself open to the charge of heresy. Indeed, it was this very passage which brought the wrath of Vernani upon him. How far Vernani's accusations were justified is well discussed by Gilson in *Dante the Philosopher*, pp. 168-71.

¹ For although the speculative intellect deals with universals and the practical intellect with particulars they are both intellectual.

² Aristotle's *Politics*, I. 2. The fact that Dante quotes Aristotle's *Politics* does not prove that he had read the work; his quotations may very well be derived, at second hand, from St. Thomas.

³ It is a commonplace of scholastic thought that some degree of leisure is essential if a man is to acquire wisdom (cf. *Ecclesiasticus* xxxviii. 25; Aristotle's *Physics*, VIII. 20).

made him a little lower than the angels.¹⁾ Hence it is clear that universal peace is the most excellent means of securing our happiness. This is why the message from on high to the shepherds announced neither wealth, nor pleasure, nor honour, nor long life, nor health, nor strength, nor beauty, but peace. The heavenly host, indeed, proclaims: 'Glory to God on high, and on earth peace to men of good will.'² 'Peace be with you' was also the salutation given by the Saviour of men,³ because it was fitting that the supreme Saviour should utter the supreme salutation—a custom which, as everyone knows, his disciples and Paul sought to preserve in their own greetings.

This argument shows us what is the better, indeed the very best means available to mankind for fulfilling its proper rôle; and also what is the most direct means of reaching that goal to which all our doings are directed—universal peace. This will serve as the basis for our subsequent argument. Such is the common ground which we declared to be essential so as to have something axiomatic to which all our proofs and demonstrations can refer.

V

Let us now return to what was said at the beginning; that there are three main problems to be solved concerning temporal monarchy, or, as it is more commonly called, the Empire. As we promised, we intend to investigate them in the order signified and on the basis of the axiom that we have established.

Thus the first question is whether temporal monarchy (1) is necessary for the well-being of the world. Now no substantial objection either from reason or authority can be urged against it, and its truth can be demonstrated by the clearest and most cogent arguments, the first of which is derived from the authority of the Philosopher in his

¹ Heb. ii. 7.

² Luke ii. 14.

³ cf. Matt. x. 12; John xx. 21.

Politics. There the acknowledged authority states that when several things are directed towards a single end it is necessary for one of them to act as director or ruler and for the others to be directed or ruled. This statement is supported not only by the glorious renown of its author but also by inductive reason. Again, if we consider an individual man we see the same principle verified : since all his faculties are directed towards happiness, his intellectual faculty is the director and ruler of all the others—otherwise he cannot attain happiness. If we consider a home, the purpose of which is to train its members to live well, we see that there has to be one member who directs and rules, either the 'pater familias' or the person occupying his position, for, as the Philosopher says, 'every home is ruled by the eldest'. And his function, as Homer says,¹ is to rule the others and lay down laws for them ; hence the proverbial curse, 'May you have an equal in your home.' If we consider a village, whose purpose is mutual help in questions of persons and goods, it is essential for one person to be supreme over all others, whether he is appointed from outside or raised to office by the consent of the others ; otherwise, not only would the community fail to provide mutual sustenance, but in some cases the community itself would be utterly destroyed through some members' scheming to take control. Similarly if we examine a city, whose purpose is to be sufficient unto itself in everything needed for the good life, we see that there must be one governing authority—and this applies not only to just but even to degenerate forms of government. If this were not so, the purpose of civil life would be frustrated and the city, as such, would cease to exist. Lastly, every kingdom (and the end of a kingdom is the same as that of a city but with a stronger bond of

¹ This quotation from Homer's *Odyssey* (Book IX) comes from Aristotle's *Politics*, I. 2, which is also the source for the preceding quotation about the home being ruled by the eldest. Dante, of course, did not know Homer in the original.

peace) needs to have a king to rule over and govern it; otherwise its inhabitants will not only fail to achieve their end as citizens but the kingdom itself will crumble, as is affirmed by the infallible Word: 'Every kingdom divided against itself shall be laid waste.'¹

If this is true of all communities and individuals who have a goal towards which they are directed, then our previous supposition is also valid. For, if it is agreed that mankind as a whole has a goal (and this we have shown to be so), then it needs one person to govern or rule over it, and the title appropriate to this person is Monarch, or Emperor.

Thus it has been demonstrated that a Monarch or Emperor is necessary for the well-being of the world.

VI

Furthermore, the order of a part stands in the same relation to the order of the whole as the part does to the whole; therefore the order within a part has as its end the order of the whole, which brings it to perfection. Hence the goodness of the order amongst the parts does not surpass the goodness of the total order; in fact the reverse is true. Now in all things this twofold order is to be found: that is, the relation of the parts towards each other; and the relation of the parts to that unity which is not itself a part (in the same way that the parts of an army are related towards each other yet are all subordinated to their commander). Hence the relation of the parts to that unity is the superior of the two orders; and the other relation is simply a function of the superior order, not vice versa. Now if this pattern of relationship is found in individual groups of human beings it must apply all the more to mankind as a group or whole, in virtue of the previous syllogism concerning the superior pattern of relationship. But it has been adequately proved in the previous chapter that this pattern is in fact found in

¹ Matt. xii. 25.

all human groups: therefore it should also be found in the whole.

Consequently all those parts below the level of a kingdom, as well as kingdoms themselves, must be subordinate to one ruler or rule, that is, to the Monarch or to Monarchy.

VII

Furthermore, mankind in one sense is a whole (that is, in relation to its component parts), but in another sense it is itself a part. It is a whole in relation to particular kingdoms and peoples, as we have previously shown; but in relation to the whole universe it is, of course, a part. Therefore just as its component parts are brought to harmony in mankind, so mankind itself has to be brought into the harmony of its appropriate whole. The component parts of mankind are brought into harmony by a single principle (as may easily be gathered from the preceding argument); and mankind itself is similarly related to the whole universe, or to its principle (that is, God, the Monarch); this harmony is achieved by one principle only, the one Prince.

It follows that Monarchy is necessary for the well-being of the world.

VIII

And everything is at its best and most perfect when in the condition intended for it by the first cause, which is God; this is self-evident—except to those who deny that the divine goodness achieves supreme perfection. It is God's intention that every created thing, in so far as its natural capacity allows, should reflect the divine likeness. This explains why it is said: 'Let us make man after our image and likeness.'¹ Although the phrase 'after our image' cannot be applied to anything inferior to man, 'likeness' can be applied to anything whatsoever, since the whole universe is simply a sort of shadow of the divine goodness. Therefore

¹ Gen. i. 26.

the human race is at its best and most perfect when, so far as its capacity allows, it is most like to God. But mankind is most like to God when it enjoys the highest degree of unity, since He alone is the true ground of unity—hence it is written: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God is one.'¹ But mankind is most one when the whole human race is drawn together into complete unity, which can only happen when it is subordinate to one Prince, as is self-evident.

Therefore when mankind is subject to one Prince it is most like to God and this implies conformity to the divine intention, which is the condition of perfection, as was proved at the beginning of this chapter.

IX

Again, a son's condition is most perfect when the son, as far as his nature allows, reproduces the perfection of the father. Mankind is the son of the heavens, which is perfect in all its works; but man is begotten by man and the sun (according to the second book of the *Physics*²). Therefore mankind's condition is most perfect when it reproduces the perfection of the heavens, so far as human nature allows. And just as the heavens are governed and directed in every movement by a single mover, which is God (as human reasoning in philosophy amply demonstrates), so, if our argument has been correct, mankind is at its best when all its movements and intentions are governed by one Prince as its sole mover and with one law for its direction.

Hence it is obvious that the world's well-being demands a Monarch or single government known as the Empire.

¹ Deut. vi. 4.

² *Physics*, II. 2. The curious view of human reproduction which Dante uses as the basis for the curious argument of this chapter should astonish us less now that anthropologists have taught us how long it has taken man to discover the secrets of reproduction.

This is the argument that led Boethius to sigh :

'How happy you would be, O mankind, if your minds were ruled by the love that rules the heavens.'¹

X

And wherever there is a possibility of dispute there has to be a judgment to settle it ; otherwise there would be imperfection without a remedy to heal it, which is impossible, since God and nature never fail in essentials.

It is clear that a dispute may arise between two princes, neither of whom is subject to the other, and that this may be their fault or their subjects' ; therefore a judgment between them is indispensable. However, since neither can take cognizance over the other (neither being subject to the other—and equals do not rule over equals), there needs to be a third person enjoying wider jurisdiction who by right rules over both of them. This person must be either the monarch (in which case our argument is complete) or not the monarch, in which case he himself will have an equal outside his own jurisdiction, and it will again be necessary to have recourse to a third person. Either this process will go on to infinity (which is impossible) or eventually it will lead us back to a first and supreme judge whose judgment will either directly or indirectly solve all disputes : he will be the Monarch, or Emperor.

Therefore monarchy is necessary to the world. And the Philosopher appreciated this truth when he wrote : 'Things resent being badly ordered ; but to have different rulers is bad ; therefore, one Prince.'²

XI

Besides, the world is best ordered when justice is at its strongest. Hence Virgil, wishing to praise the new order that seemed to be emerging in his day, sang : 'Now the

¹ Boethius, *De Consolazione Philosophiae*, Book II, Poem 8.

² *Metaphysics*, XII. 10.

Virgin is again returning; and the Saturnian reign begins once more.¹ By 'Virgin' he meant Justice, which is also called Astrea; by 'Saturn's rule' he referred to the finest ages, which are also described as 'golden'. Justice is at its strongest only under a Monarch; therefore Monarchy or Empire is essential if the world is to attain a perfect order.

If we are to understand the minor premiss fully, it is essential to appreciate that justice, in itself and strictly considered, is rectitude, a rule permitting no deviation; consequently it is not subject to shades of more or less, any more, for instance, than *whiteness* considered in the abstract. For such forms, though realized in particular circumstances, are simple and unchangeable in essence, as the Master of the Six Principles rightly says.² In actuality, however, these qualities vary in intensity according to the degree in which the subjects of them are subject also to their contraries. But where the contrary of justice is at its faintest (whether actively or potentially), there justice is at its strongest; and then one may truly say—as, indeed, the philosopher does—'Neither Lucifer nor Hesperus is so wonderful.'³ For then she is like Phoebe in the rosy serenity of the dawn gazing across at her brother on the opposite horizon.

Considered in its potentiality the contrary of justice sometimes lies in the will; for even when justice is present, if the will is not entirely purified of all cupidity, justice is not present in all the splendour of its purity; because such a subject offers a certain resistance to it, however slight; hence those who try to arouse a judge's passions deserve to be censured. In regard to acts, the contrary of justice is

¹ *Bucolics*, IV. 6.

² The Master of the Six Principles, Gilbert de la Porrée, Bishop of Poitiers (1070–1154), was given this title on account of his work, *De Sex Principiis*. The forms that are intrinsically absolute, not themselves subject to degree (e.g. rectitude and whiteness), may yet be more or less present in different subjects.

³ Dante takes this saying of Aristotle's from St. Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologia*, II–II. Q. 58, art. xii.

to be found in limitations on power; for since justice is a virtue governing relations, between people, how can it operate in practice without the power of rendering to each his due? Hence the stronger the just man is in practice, the greater will be his justice.

On the basis of this exposition we reason as follows: justice is most powerful in the world when located in a subject with a perfect will and most power; such is the Monarch alone; therefore justice is at its most potent in this world when located in the Monarch alone.

This preparatory syllogism¹ is of the second figure,² with intrinsic negation, and takes the following form: all B is A; only C is A; therefore only C is B. That is: all B is A; nothing except C is B. The first proposition clearly holds, for the reasons already given; the other follows by reference first to the will and then to power.

To see the first clearly we must recognize, as Aristotle affirms in the fifth book of his *Nicomachean Ethics*,³ that the greatest obstacle to justice is cupidity. When cupidity is entirely eliminated there remains nothing opposed to justice: hence the Philosopher's maxim that 'nothing which can be judged by the law should ever be left to the judge's discretion';⁴ and he gave this salutary warning because he feared that cupidity which all too easily distorts men's minds. But when there is nothing to be desired there can

¹ Preparatory in the sense that its conclusion is meant to serve as the premiss for the main syllogism.

² In Aristotelian logic syllogisms fall into one of three shapes, or figures; it is the position of the middle or common term which determines whether it is a syllogism of the first, second or third figure. Thus Dante's syllogism here is of the second figure because the 'A' occurs as a predicate in both the major and the minor premiss.

The 'intrinsic negation' is due to the use of the negating, or exclusive, term 'only' in 'only C'.

³ *Nicomachean Ethics*, V. 2.

⁴ Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, I. 1.

be no cupidity, because the passions cannot remain when their objects have been eliminated. But the Monarch has nothing to desire, since the ocean alone is the limit of his jurisdiction—unlike other princes, such as the Kings of Castile and Aragon, whose jurisdictions are limited by one another's frontiers. It follows that of all mortals the Monarch can be the purest incarnation of justice. Moreover, just as cupidity invariably clouds the vision of justice no matter how slightly, so charity, or rightly ordered love, illuminates and sharpens it. Therefore justice finds its strongest bastion in the place where rightly ordered love is most intense; such is the Monarch, and so justice is at its most powerful, or at least can be, when there is a Monarch. That rightly ordered love does have this effect can be shown as follows: cupidity, scorning man's intrinsic nature, aims at other things; but charity scorns those other things, is directed towards God and man, and so towards the good of man. And since to live in peace, as we previously demonstrated, is the chief of human blessings, and since justice is the most powerful means towards it, charity gives force to justice, so that the more powerful it is the more force justice will have. That rightly ordered love should be found most of all in the Monarch is shown thus: an object is the more loved the nearer it is to the lover; but men are nearer to the Monarch than to other princes; therefore they are more greatly loved by him, or ought to be.

The first proposition becomes evident if we consider the general nature of agents and patients; the second is demonstrated by the fact that it is only as belonging to different parts that men are drawn to other princes, whereas it is through belonging to the whole that they are related to the Monarch. Again, they are brought into contact with other princes through the Monarch, and not vice versa. So prior and immediate tutelage over them all belongs to the Monarch, and to other princes through the Monarch, which means that their tutelage is derived from his. Again,

the more universal a cause is, the more perfect a cause it is, because the subordinate cause is only such in virtue of the superior, as is shown in the *De Causis*; ¹ and the more perfect the cause, the more it loves its proper effect, because this love is a function of the cause as such. Since, therefore, the Monarch is of all mortals the most universal cause of human well-being (because other princes, as we have seen, are only effective in virtue of him), it follows that the good of man is most keenly desired by him.

And who but a person ignorant of the world's meaning would doubt that justice is most powerfully served by the Monarch? For if there is a Monarch then he cannot have any enemies.

The minor premiss having been proved, the conclusion is certain: that Monarchy is necessary for perfect world-order.

XII

And the human race is at its best when most free.

This statement will become clear if we explain the principle of freedom, for then it will be seen that the fundamental principle of our freedom is free choice; and though many pay service to this truth with their lips, few do with their understanding. They do indeed go so far as to say that free choice is a free judgment exercised upon the will; and they speak the truth—but are far from understanding the meaning of the words. They are like our logicians who produce certain propositions mechanically, as examples in logic, such as: 'A triangle has three angles equal to two right angles.' Therefore I say that a judgment is the middle term connecting apprehension and appetite.² First of all,

¹ An anonymous work greatly esteemed by medieval thinkers. Translated from Arabic into Latin by Gerard of Cremona in the twelfth century, it was attributed for a long time to Aristotle.

² 'Appetitus' does not bear the restricted meaning usually given nowadays to the English word 'appetite'; it is directed not essentially towards things of the senses but towards those of the mind and spirit.

something is apprehended ; then it is judged to be either good or bad ; and finally the person judging either seeks or rejects it. If the judgment completely directs the appetite and is in no way deflected by it, then it is free ; but if the judgment is in any way deflected or influenced by the appetite it cannot be free, because it is not independent but is dragged along captive in the wake of another. And this is why the brute beasts cannot enjoy free judgment ; because their judgments always follow their appetites. It also explains how intellectual substances,¹ whose wills are immutable, and disembodied souls who depart this life in a state of grace, do not lose their free choice on account of their wills being immutable but rather enjoy it in its highest perfection.

Once this is realized, it becomes equally clear that this liberty, or this principle of all our liberty, is God's most precious gift to human nature, for by it we are made happy here as men, and happy as gods in the beyond. In which case who would not agree that mankind is at its best when it is able to make fullest use of this principle ? But this plenitude of freedom it enjoys only under a Monarchy.

Hence it must be recognized that to be free means 'self-dependence, and not dependence on another', as the Philosopher maintains in the *Metaphysics*.² For whatever is dependent on another is conditioned by it even as the means is conditioned by the end it serves. But only under a Monarchy is mankind self-dependent and not dependent on another ; then only are perverted forms of government rectified, such as democracies, oligarchies and tyrannies (which force mankind into slavery, as is obvious to anyone who considers the matter) ; their government is conducted by kings, aristocrats (known as *optimates*) and zealots for the people's freedom, because, as we have already shown, the Monarch in his supreme love for men wishes all of them to be good. This is impossible for the perverted forms

1 i.e. angels.

2 *Metaphysics*, I. 2.

of government. Hence the Philosopher says that 'in the perverted forms a good man is a bad citizen, whereas in the true form to be a good citizen is the same as being a good man'.¹ And these true forms of government aim at liberty; they intend men to go on living for their own sakes. Here the citizens do not exist for the sake of the consuls, nor the people for the sake of the king; on the contrary, the king is for the sake of the people, and the consuls for the citizen. Because just as the laws are made for the sake of the body politic rather than the body politic for the laws, likewise those living under the law do not exist for the sake of the legislator but he for them (as the Philosopher asserts in the writings which he has left to us on this issue²). From which it is evident that although the consul or the king are lords over others in regard to means, they are themselves ministers towards others in regard to ends. And this is particularly true of the Monarch, who is to be considered the minister of everyone. Thus one can already recognize how the very purpose of law-making postulates the necessity of Monarchy.

Therefore mankind is in its best condition under a Monarch; from which it follows that monarchy is necessary for the well-being of the world.

XIII

Again, the person best suited for governing is the one who brings the best out of others; for in every action the agent (whether acting from choice or from the exigencies of its nature) seeks primarily to reproduce its own likeness. Hence every agent delights in its own action; for since everything that is desires its own being, and since the being of any agent is increased through its actions, joy is the necessary consequence, because joy always accompanies the

¹ *Politics*, III. 4.

² Not a direct quotation from the *Politics*, this principle is a commonplace amongst medieval writers upon politics.

desired object. Therefore nothing can act unless it has the quality that is to be transferred to the patient, on which account the Philosopher in the *Metaphysics* writes: 'The movement from potentiality to act takes place by means of something already in act.'¹ Any attempt to act in another manner would prove vain.

And this argument refutes the error of those who believe that they can mould the lives and morals of others by speaking well and doing evil, who do not realize that it was the hands of Jacob rather than his words that proved persuasive, the former speaking truth and the latter falsehood.² Hence the Philosopher says, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*: 'In regard to passions and actions words carry less conviction than deeds.'³ Similarly the voice from heaven questioned the sinner David: 'Why do you tell of my righteousness?'⁴ as if to say: 'Your speech is in vain so long as what you are belies your speech.'

From which it can be seen that the person wishing to bring the best out of others must himself be in the best condition. But the one in the best condition for governing is none other than the Monarch. This is demonstrated as follows: any thing is in a better and more suitable condition to acquire a particular quality or perform a particular act the less it contains of any contrary tendency. Thus persons who have never been taught anything are in a better condition for acquiring philosophical truth than those who have long been imbued with false opinions; on which Galen wisely comments: 'Such people need double the time to acquire knowledge.'⁵ Since the Monarch, then, can have no cause for cupidity (or, of all men, has the least cause for it, as we have already shown), and in this differs

¹ *Metaphysics*, IX. 8.

² Gen. xxvii. 1 ff.

³ *Nicomachean Ethics*, X. 1.

⁴ Ps. xlix. 16.

⁵ *De Cognoscendis Curandisque Animi Morbis*, X.

from other princes, and since cupidity alone perverts the judgment and compels justice, it follows that the Monarch is in a perfect—or at least the best possible—condition for governing, because he surpasses all others in the power of his judgment and justice. And these two qualities are those supremely fitting for the person who makes and carries out the law, as was maintained by that most holy king when he implored God to grant the things most essential for a king and his son : ‘God,’ he said, ‘give to the king your judgment, and to the king’s son your justice.’¹

Therefore what was said in the minor premiss was right, that the Monarch alone is completely equipped to rule; therefore the Monarch alone is able to bring the best out of others. From which it follows that Monarchy is necessary for the perfect ordering of the world.

XIV

And it is better, wherever possible, for something to be performed by one single means rather than by several.

This is demonstrated as follows. Let A be the means by which a certain thing can be accomplished, and let A and B be several means by which the same thing can be accomplished. But if A alone is adequate for doing what A and B together can do, the introduction of B is unnecessary; because no consequence follows from making the assumption B, for the consequence desired has already been achieved by A alone. And since all similar assumptions are idle or superfluous, and superfluity is displeasing both to God and nature, and everything displeasing to God and nature is evil (as is self-evident), then not only is it better for something that can be accomplished by a single means to be done by that single means rather than by several, it is good in itself to use the single means and plain evil to employ several. Moreover, a thing is considered better the nearer it is to the best; and the best is found in the end

¹ Ps. lxxi. 1.

envised ; but to use a single means is to shorten the distance towards the end : therefore it is the better. That it is nearer is obvious : let C be the end ; let it be reached by a single means A ; let it be reached by several, A and B ; clearly the distance from A through B to C is greater than from A straight to C.

But mankind is capable of being governed by a single supreme prince, who is the Monarch.

Of course, when we say 'mankind can be governed by one supreme prince' we do not mean to say that minute decisions concerning every township can proceed directly from him (though even municipal laws sometimes prove wanting and need supplementing from outside, as we see from the Philosopher's remarks in the fifth book of the *Ethics*,¹ where he commends the principle of equity). For nations, kingdoms and cities have different characteristics which demand different laws for their government, law being intended as a concrete rule of life. The Scythians, for instance, live outside the seventh circle, experience extreme inequalities of day and night and endure an almost intolerably piercing frost ; they require a different rule from the Garamantes who live in the equinoctial zone, where the days and nights are of equal duration and where the excessive heat makes it unbearable to wear clothes. But our meaning is that mankind should be ruled by one supreme prince and directed towards peace by a common law issuing from him and applied to those characteristics which are common to all men. This common rule, or law, should be accepted from him by particular princes, in the same way as the practical reason preparing for action accepts its major proposition from the speculative intellect and then derives from it the minor proposition appropriate to the particular case, and finally proceeds to action. It is not only possible for one movement to issue from a single source, it is necessary for it to do so in order to eliminate confusion

¹ *Nicomachean Ethics*, V. 14.

about universal principles. Indeed this was precisely what Moses says he did in writing the Law: having called together the chiefs of the tribes of Israel he left minor judgments to them whilst reserving to himself the major decisions that affected everyone; these were then applied by the chiefs of the tribes according to the particular needs of each tribe.¹

Therefore it is better for mankind to be ruled by one person than by several (that is, by the Monarch who is the sole prince) and if better, then more acceptable to God; for God always wills the better. And since when only two things are being compared the better is the same as the best, then not only is rule by 'one' more acceptable to God than rule by 'several', it is the *most* acceptable. It follows that mankind is at its best when under a single ruler; and so Monarchy is essential to the well-being of the world.

XV

Again, I say that priority is attributed to 'being', 'unity' and 'goodness', in that order, according to the fifth sense of the word 'priority'. For being naturally comes before unity, and unity before goodness: the perfect being is perfect unity and the perfect unity is perfect goodness, and the further anything is removed from perfect being the further it is from being one and being good. Therefore within each kind of being the best is that which is most one, as the Philosopher maintains in the *Metaphysics*.² Hence unity seems to be the ground of goodness and multiplicity the ground of evil; for this reason Pythagoras in his Correlations places unity on the side of goodness and multiplicity on the side of evil, as we are told in the first book of the *Metaphysics*.³ Hence we can see that to sin is to despise

¹ *Exod.* xviii. 18 ff.

² Dante's whole discussion of unity is inspired by the tenth book of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*.

³ *Metaphysics*, I. 5.

and abandon unity for the sake of multiplicity. The Psalmist perceived this when he said: 'They are multiplied in the fruit of corn and wine and oil.'¹

It is clear, then, that every good thing is good in virtue of being one. And since concord, as such, is a good, it is obviously rooted in unity. The root of concord is discovered if we examine its definition and nature. Concord is a harmonious movement of several wills. This definition shows that the unity of wills connoted by 'harmonious movement' is the root of concord or is itself concord. For just as we should describe several clods which all fell towards the same centre as concordant and say that several flames shooting out towards the same circumference were concordant (if they did so voluntarily), similarly we describe several men as being in concord when their wills are simultaneously directed towards the same formal object (which is present in their wills as the quality of gravity is present in the clods and levity in the flames). But the capacity for willing represents a potentiality and the good it apprehends is its form. This form, though one in itself, like other forms, becomes multiplied through the multiplicity of the matter on which it is impressed—just like soul and number, and other composite forms.

These premisses having been stated we can now develop the argument for the proposition we wish to maintain: all concord depends upon the unity of wills; mankind is at its best in a state of concord; for as a man is at his best in body and soul when he is in a state of concord, the same is true of a house, a city and a kingdom, and of mankind as a whole. Therefore mankind at its best depends upon unity in the wills of its members. But this is impossible unless there is one will which dominates all others and holds them in unity, for the wills of mortals, influenced by their adolescent and seductive delights, are in need of a director, as the Philosopher teaches at the end of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.²

¹ Ps. iv. 8.

² *Nicomachean Ethics*, X. 10.

Nor can there be such a single will unless there is a prince over all, whose will guides and rules those of all others.

Now if the preceding conclusions are all true—as they are—then Monarchy is necessary for the perfect order of mankind in this world. Consequently a Monarch is essential to the well-being of the world.

XVI

The preceding arguments are confirmed by a noteworthy historical fact, that is, by the state of humanity which the Son of God either awaited or himself brought about when He was to become man for the salvation of men. For if we survey the ages and condition of men since the fall of our first parents (the false step from which all our errors have proceeded) at no time do we see universal peace throughout the world except during the perfect monarchy of the immortal Augustus. The fact that mankind at that time was resting happily in universal peace is attested by all the historians and the illustrious poets. Even the recorder of Christ's gentleness has deigned to bear witness to it.¹ Finally Paul, also, described that blissful state as 'the fulness of time'.² The times were indeed full, and temporal desires fulfilled because nothing that ministers to our happiness was without its minister. But what state the world has been in since that seamless garment³ was rent on the nail of cupidity we may easily read—would that we could not behold it!

O humanity, in how many storms must you be tossed, how many shipwrecks must you endure, so long as you

¹ Luke ii. 1. Though this verse of Scripture does not specifically mention peace, it was assumed by commentators that Augustus could not have issued a universal edict if there had not been universal peace (cf. Letter VII, 3).

² Gal. iv. 4.

³ John xix. 23. The seamless garment is taken to symbolize the unity of the Empire, which was rent by the Donation of Constantine. See p. 56, note 1.

turn yourself into a many-headed beast lusting after a multiplicity of things! You are ailing in both your intellectual powers,¹ as well as in heart: you pay no heed to the unshakeable principles of your higher intellect, nor illumine your lower intellect with experience, nor tune your heart to the sweetness of divine counsel when it is breathed into you through the trumpet of the Holy Spirit: 'Behold how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.'²

¹ The higher or speculative intellect, and the lower or practical intellect.

² Ps. cxxxii. 1.

BOOK TWO

I

‘WHY have the nations raged, and the people meditated vain things? The kings of the earth have arisen and the princes have gathered together against the Lord and against his Christ. Let us burst their chains and cast their yoke from us.’¹

Just as we tend to wonder at the unusual effects of some cause which we have not yet discerned, so, when we do recognize the cause, we look down rather derisively upon those who remain lost in wonder.

At one time I myself marvelled at the way the Roman people had gained sway throughout the world without meeting any resistance, for I was only taking a superficial view, imagining that they owed their supremacy simply to armed force and not to right. But after my mind’s eye had penetrated to the heart of the story and I recognized the convincing marks of divine providence directing it, my wonder gave place to a somewhat derisive contempt when I thought of the nations raging against the supremacy of the Roman people, when I saw the people meditating vain things (as I myself once did) and especially when I saw the sorry spectacle of kings and princes agreeing upon only one thing—resistance to their Lord, to the anointed One, the Roman Prince.² Thus in derision not unmixed with grief I take

¹ Ps. ii. 1–3.

² The reference is to the opponents of the Emperor Henry VII, whom Dante does not hesitate to describe as the ‘anointed One’

up on behalf of that glorious people and of Caesar the cry which sounded from the Prince of Heaven: 'Why have nations raged, and the people meditated vain things? The kings of the earth have arisen, and the princes have gathered together against the Lord and against his Christ.' Yet, since natural love cannot bear to maintain derision, so, just as the summer sun breaks through the morning mists and shines forth in splendour, natural love disperses derision, and prefers to shed the light of correction, to break the chains of ignorance binding kings and princes. And so in order to show that mankind is free from their yoke I will myself imitate the holy prophet by exclaiming with him, in the following words: 'Let us burst their chains and cast their yoke from us.'

Both these aims will be accomplished if I fulfil the second part of my present plan and provide the true solution to the problem in hand. For by showing that the Roman Empire was founded upon right not only shall I disperse the clouds of ignorance veiling the eyes of kings and princes, who usurp the control of public affairs and falsely imagine that the Roman people did likewise,¹ but I shall also enable all men to acknowledge themselves as free from their yoke.

— The truth of the matter can be demonstrated not only in the light of human reason, but also in the radiance of divine authority: and when these two are in harmony both heaven and earth must bow before them. Supported by this initial (i.e. the Messiah), any more than he hesitates to greet Henry with the words addressed by St. John the Baptist to Jesus: 'Behold the Lamb of God . . .' (cf. Letter VII, 10, and his application to Henry of Isaiah's prophecy of the Redeemer, Letter VI, 5).

This passage is also relevant to the dating of the treatise: it shows that Henry had already been anointed at the time of writing—though we cannot say whether the anointing is that of January 6, 1311, at Milan, or June 29, 1312, at Rome—or even January 6, 1309,² at Aix-la-Chapelle. See Note on Chronology, p. 120.

¹ Dante is thinking of King Robert of Naples, who led the coalition against Henry VII, and whose publicists maintained that the Roman people secured dominion by force.

confidence and trusting to the testimony of reason and authority, I proceed to the solution of the second problem.

II

Having discovered the truth about the first dispute—as far as the subject-matter will allow—the solution of the second now calls for inquiry. That is: whether the Roman people acquired the Imperial dignity by right. And the first step in this inquiry is to ascertain the truth that will serve as the first principle for all the arguments involved in the inquiry.

It must be pointed out that nature, like art, may be considered under three aspects. In the case of art these are the mind of the artist, the instrument he uses and the material on which he works. In nature the corresponding aspects are the mind of the first mover, who is God, and then the heavens, which are a sort of instrument for communicating the image of eternal goodness to the third aspect, that of fluctuating matter. Now when there is a perfect artist employing a perfect instrument any imperfection in the work of art must be attributed to the matter, and since God is supreme perfection and His instrument, the heavens, never lacks the requisite perfection (as our philosophical discourse on this subject has shown) it follows that any imperfection in things here below must be the fault of their matter and is contrary to the intention both of the divine author and of the heavens. Similarly whatever is good in things here below cannot come from their matter (which in itself is a mere potency) but primarily from the divine artist and secondly from the heavens, which are the instrument of divine art and are commonly called ‘nature’.

Hence it is evident that right, being a good, exists first in the mind of God; and since everything in the mind of God is God (according to the statement ‘what was made in Him was life’),¹ and since God himself is the object of His own will, it follows that right, in so far as it exists in Him, is

¹ John i. 3.

willed by God.¹ And since the will and its object are identical in God² it again follows that the divine will is right itself. A further consequence is that right as it is found here below is a reflection of the divine will; therefore nothing out of accord with the divine will can be right, and everything consonant with the divine will is right. Thus to say that something has happened by right is the same as to say that it has taken place according to the will of God. We may therefore assume that the expression of God's will in human society is also a true and unquestionable expression of right. At the same time we do well to remember, as the Philosopher teaches in the first book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, 'the same kind of certainty is not to be expected in every subject but only in so far as the particular subject-matter allows'.³ Thus our arguments can safely proceed upon the principle we have established, if we judge the right of that glorious people by its manifest signs and the authoritative statements of sages. It is true that the will of God in itself is invisible, but 'the invisible things of God are perceived and understood through His works';⁴ for although the seal is hidden the wax on which it is impressed gives us a clear knowledge of what remains hidden. Nor is it surprising that the divine will has to be sought in signs, for we even have to rely upon external signs to discover any human being's will, except our own.

III

I maintain, then, that it was by right, not by usurpation, that the Roman people acquired that monarchical office over other men which is called the Empire.

The first proof of this runs: it was right for the noblest

¹ God's essence includes right; God's essence is the primary object of His will, hence Dante's conclusion.

² God being perfect, His will does not need to go outside Himself for its realization; consequently there is no separation between His will and its object.

³ *Nicomachean Ethics*, I. 7.

⁴ Rom. i. 20; Letter V, 8.

people to be head of all the others ; the Roman people were the noblest ; therefore it was right for them to be head of all the others.

The major premiss is proved by reason ; for since 'honour is the reward of virtue', and every promotion is an honour, every promotion is the reward of virtue. But all agree that men are ennobled by merit of virtue, either their own or their ancestors. As the Philosopher says in the *Politics* 'nobility is virtue and ancient wealth',¹ or in Juvenal's words : 'Nobility of mind is the one and only virtue.'²

These two statements refer to two kinds of nobility, that is to say, their own and their ancestors'. Therefore the reward of preferment goes to the noble as naturally as an effect follows from its cause. And since rewards are commensurate with merits (in the words of the Gospel, 'the measure you have used for others will be your measure also'³) it is right for the noblest to have the greatest preferment.

The minor premiss is substantiated by the testimony of the ancients ; for by the undying testimony of our divine poet Virgil we know that the glorious king Aeneas was father of the Roman people. And that illustrious historian of Roman deeds, Titus Livius, confirms his testimony in the first part of the volume, which takes up the story at the capture of Troy.⁴ It would be quite impossible for me to describe at length the pre-eminent nobility of that most pious and ever-victorious father. The task would be impossible not only on account of his own virtue but also that

¹ *Politics*, IV. 8.

² Juvenal, *Satires*, VIII. 20.

³ Matt. vii. 2.

⁴ Dante's references to Livy are so vague that many doubt whether he ever read Livy in the original, suggesting that he is only acquainted with him through Florus (a Roman historian who abridged Livy's work) or through Orosius (a Christian, friend of St. Augustine, who wrote a history of the world in the early years of the fifth century).

of his ancestors and wives, two streams of nobility which flowed into him by hereditary right. Instead I shall follow the main course of events.¹

In regard to his own nobility let us listen to our Poet in the first book when he introduces Ilioneus as he prays :

‘our king was Aeneas : there was never a juster than he,
nor any more pious, nor greater in war and chivalry.’²

Let us also hear him in his sixth book, speaking of the dead Misenus, who had served Hector in war and, after Hector’s death, had transferred to the service of Aeneas ; he says that Misenus ‘had entered no less noble service’,³ comparing Aeneas to Hector whom Homer glorifies above all other heroes, as the Philosopher indicates in the seventh book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.⁴

As for his hereditary nobility we find that all the three parts of the world⁵ conspired to ennable him, whether by ancestry or by marriage. For Asia provided his more immediate ancestors, such as Assaracus and others who ruled over Phrygia, a region of Asia ; hence our Poet says in his third book :

‘after it had pleased the gods to throw Asia into turmoil
and displace the innocent race of Priam’⁶

Europe gave him his most ancient ancestor in the male line, that is, Dardanus. In the female line the most ancient came from Africa, Electra, daughter of the famous King Atlas. Testimony to both of these comes from our Poet in his eighth book where Aeneas says to Evander :

‘Sailing to Teucri comes Dardanus, the first father and founder of the city of Ilium ; he was born, the Greeks maintain, from Electra, and she herself sprang from the great Atlas who bears the vault of heaven upon his shoulders.’⁷

¹ *Aeneid*, I. 342.

² *ibid.* I. 544 ff.

³ *ibid.* VI. 170.

⁴ *Nicomachean Ethics*, VII. 1.

⁵ Dante here follows Orosius’ tripartite division of the world.

⁶ *Aeneid*, III. 1 ff.

⁷ *ibid.* VIII. 134 ff.

And it is the burden of our bard¹ in the third book that Dardanus came to birth in Europe:

‘There is a place which the Greeks call Hesperia, ancient, strong in arms and of fertile soil ; it is tilled by the Oenotrians ; now it is held that later generations have named the nation Italy, from their leader’s name : this is our true home, for hence sprang Dardanus.’²

That Atlas was from Africa is evident from the mountain there bearing his name, and which Orosius refers to in his description of the world when he says, ‘its furthest limit is Mount Atlas and the islands they call the Fortunate’ ;³ by ‘its’ he means Africa, of which he is then speaking.

In a similar fashion he was ennobled by marriage. His first wife, Creusa, the daughter of King Priam, was from Asia, as may be gathered from previous quotations. That she was his wife is proved by our Poet in his third book where Andromache questions father Aeneas about his son Ascanius :

‘What of the boy Ascanius, whom Creusa bore to you whilst Troy was already smouldering ? Has he survived ? and does he still breathe earth’s air?’⁴

His second wife was Dido, queen and mother of the Carthaginians in Africa ; that she was his wife is the theme of our Poet in the fourth book ; there he sings of Dido :

‘No longer does Dido contemplate a furtive love.

She calls it marriage, and by that name hides her fault.’⁵

The third was Lavinia, mother of both the Albans and the Romans, daughter as well as heiress of King Latinus if we

¹ Dante here refers to Virgil as ‘Vates’, a term which expresses the poet’s prophetic function. Within the history of Rome Virgil plays a part similar, in Dante’s mind, to that of the prophet in the history of Israel.

² *Aeneid*, III. 163 ff.

³ Orosius, *History*, I. 2.

⁴ *Aeneid*, III. 339.

⁵ *ibid.* IV. 171 ff.

are to believe our Poet in his last book, where he introduces the defeated Turnus making supplication to Aeneas in the words :

‘You have conquered; and the Ausonians have seen the conquered stretch forth his hands upturned: Lavinia is yours to wife.’¹

Once these witnesses confirming the minor premiss have been cited, who will not acknowledge that the father of the Roman people, and therefore that people itself, was the noblest beneath the heavens? Or who will fail to recognize the work of divine providence in the threefold conflux of blood from each part of the world into the veins of one man?

IV

Moreover, the fact that an event is consummated with the aid of miracles is a sign that God wills it and that it takes place by right.

This is clearly true since, as Thomas says in the third book of his *Contra Gentiles*, ‘a miracle is something done by God outside the usual scheme of things.’² From which he proves that the working of miracles is the prerogative of God alone, an opinion confirmed by Moses, who tells how when it came to making lice, Pharaoh’s magicians, employing the natural principles of their craft, failed and cried out: ‘This is the finger of God.’³ If a miracle, then, is the immediate work of the First Cause without the co-operation of secondary causes (as Thomas adequately proves in the book quoted⁴), then it is impious, when anything is sanctioned by a miracle, to deny that the thing so favoured is willed by divine providence and is pleasing to God. Thus the right-

¹ *Aeneid*, XII. 936.

² *Summa Contra Gentiles*, III. 101.

³ *Exod.* viii. 19.

⁴ *Summa Contra Gentiles*, III. 99.

eous thing is to acknowledge the contradictory ; which is, that the Roman Empire was brought to perfection with the aid of miracles, and was therefore willed by God. Consequently it was, and is, founded upon right.

That God did intervene miraculously in the foundation of the Roman Empire is confirmed by the testimony of illustrious authors. Livy, in the first part of his work, assures us that when Numa Pompilius, the second king of the Romans, was offering sacrifice according to the pagan rite, a shield fell from heaven into the chosen city of God.¹ This miracle is recorded by Lucan in the ninth book of the *Pharsalia* when he describes the incredible force of the south wind to which Lybia is exposed. Here is what he says :

‘Doubtless that was how those shields, worn by chosen youths around their patrician necks, dropped down to Numa as he was offering sacrifice : Auster or Boreas had spoiled the peoples bearing our shields.’²

Again Livy and many other illustrious writers all agree that when the Gauls, having captured the rest of the city, and trusting to the darkness of the night, secretly stole up to the Capitol, there was a goose—never seen there before—which screeched warning of the Gauls’ approach and stirred the guards to defend the Capitol.³ This was the incident our Poet had in mind in his eighth book when he described the shield of Aeneas ; his refrain runs :

‘On the summit of the Tarpeian citadel Manlius stood on guard before the temple and held the heights of the Capitol ; the newly-built palace was still bristling with Romulus’ thatch. And already a goose wrought in silver, flying beneath the golden porticoes, was announcing that the Gauls were at the gate.’⁴

And amongst the other great events of the Punic War Livy tells how the nobility of Rome was so reduced by the threat

¹ Another somewhat vague memory of Livy, I. 20.

² *Pharsalia*, IX. 477.

³ Livy, V. 43.

⁴ *Aeneid*, VIII. 652

from Hannibal that the destruction of Rome seemed to await only on the arrival of the Carthaginian hordes. Then a blinding hailstorm suddenly broke and prevented the victors from completing their victory.¹ And was not Cloelia's passage through the waters miraculous when, although a woman and a prisoner, she broke her chains and, supported by God's marvellous aid, swam across the Tiber (as almost all Roman historians record to her glory)?²

It seemed most appropriate for the one who has ordained things to the pattern of eternal beauty to operate in this manner: that when visible himself he should perform miracles to signify invisible things, and when invisible should use them to signify visible things.

V

Again, whoever wills the good of the community thereby wills the achievement of right.

This consequence is demonstrated as follows. Right is a relation existing between human beings in their dealings with each other and in their dealings with things. When right is maintained, human society is preserved, but when it is neglected society is corrupted. (This contrasts with the description in the *Digests*, which does not give the essence of right but simply describes its practical application.³) But if our definition adequately embraces the essence and purpose of right, then since the end of every society is the common good of its members, the purpose of right is necessarily to secure the common good, and it is impossible for right not to be directed towards the common good. Thus Cicero is correct when he says in the first book of his *Rhetoric*, 'the laws must always be interpreted as aiming at the common good.' So that if the laws are not directed to the benefit of

¹ Livy, XXVI. 11.

² Livy, II. 13.

³ The *Digests*, extracts from the writings of the jurists, compiled in 533 at the instance of the Emperor Justinian.

those under the law, then they are not really laws but only nominally so ; for the function of law is to bind men together for their mutual benefit. Thus Seneca puts it well in his book *De Quatuor Virtutibus* when he says, 'law is the bond of human society.'¹

It is evident, then, that whoever aims at the good of the community is seeking to achieve right. If the Romans, therefore, had the good of the community as their goal it is true to say that they were pursuing right. The fact that the Roman people did have that good as their goal in conquering the whole world is proved by their very deeds. For that holy, pious and glorious people repressed all that greed which is harmful to the community, preferring universal peace and liberty ; so much so that they seem to have sacrificed their own advantage in order to secure the general well-being of mankind. It has justly been written : 'The Roman Empire was begotten in the womb of piety.'²

But since external signs are the only means by which a free agent's intentions can be detected by any other person, and since all statements have to be examined with regard to their proper limits, as we have said before, we shall have sufficient evidence about the Roman people's intentions in the expressions acknowledged to have been made either by individuals or in council. It is in councils that individuals are drawn into public affairs ; and to learn their attitude we can rely upon the authority of Cicero in the second book of his *De Officiis* :

'So long as control of public affairs was based upon service and not on oppression wars were conducted either for the sake of allies or to preserve order, and the consequences of the wars were mild, or at least unavoidable. The senate was a refuge and stronghold for kings, peoples and nations. Both our magistrates and our commanders sought their title to praise in justly and loyally defending

¹ This book was wrongly attributed to Seneca throughout most of the Middle Ages.

² A saying that the Imperial Chancellery had already made its own by the late twelfth century.

the provinces and our allies. One might call it protection rather than command of the world.'¹

Thus speaks Cicero.

As far as individual persons are concerned I shall come straight to the point. For how could it be denied that they were inspired by desire for the common good who through poverty, through exile, through loss of their children and mutilation of their limbs, and finally by the sacrifice of their very lives, strove to promote the public welfare? Has not the great Cincinnatus provided us with a blessed example of how titles should be utterly laid aside at the proper time? He who, as Livy tells us, was called from the plough to be dictator, yet after his triumph and victory handed back the sceptre of command to the consuls, and returned of his own free will to sweat away at the plough behind his oxen. Indeed Cicero praised him for this fine deed in his *De Fine Bonorum*, quoting it as an argument against Epicurus: 'Even so did our ancestors take the great Cincinnatus from the plough to make him dictator.'² And did not Fabricius afford us a noble example of how to resist avarice? For, poor though he was, his loyalty to the republic led him to scoff at the great weight of gold offered to him; and having scoffed at it he then rejected the offer in terms worthy of the man he was.³ This testimony to him is confirmed by our Poet in his sixth book when he sings of 'Fabricius, great in his small possessions'.⁴ And have we not been given a memorable example of how to put the law before personal advantage by Camillus, who, according to Livy, was under sentence of exile yet delivered his fatherland from siege, restored the spoils to Rome (even the spoil taken from Rome), and then took his leave of the holy city—although the entire population clamoured for him to stay. He only returned when he received permission to do so on the authority of the senate.⁵

¹ *De Officiis*, II. 8.

² *De Finibus*, II. 4.

³ cf. *Aeneid*, VI. 756–853

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ The story of Camillus is given in Livy, V. 32 ff.

This magnanimity is cited in his praise by the Poet in his sixth book, where he speaks of 'Camillus bringing back the standards'.¹

Did not the first Brutus teach us how our very sons, not to mention other people, must be valued less than freedom of the fatherland? For Livy relates of him that as consul he condemned his own sons to death for conspiring with the enemy.² And his glory is kept fresh in the sixth book of our Poet, where we read :

‘through love of fair liberty the father condemns even
his own sons who were planning new wars.’³

To what daring deeds for the fatherland are we not inspired by Mucius, who fell upon Porsenna unawares, and then, as he watched his guilty hand burning in the fire, preserved the same countenance as he would in face of an enemy being tortured? Livy is full of wonder as he recalls this deed.⁴ And in the same company are to be numbered those holy victims, the Decii, who sacrificed their lives out of devotion to the fatherland, and have been praised by Livy with all the skill at his command (which yet falls far below the merit of their deeds).⁵ No more can words express the sacrifice made by that inflexible instigator of liberty, Marcus Cato.⁶ The former chose the shades of death for the salvation of their fatherland; and the latter, in order to fill the world with love of freedom, showed how great freedom is by preferring to die rather than live without it. The splendour of these glorious names shines bright again

¹ *Aeneid*, VI. 825 ff.

² *Livy*, II. 5.

³ *Aeneid*, VI. 820 ff.

⁴ *Livy*, II. 12.

⁵ *Livy*, VIII. 9.

⁶ The importance in Dante's eyes of Marcus Cato's stand for liberty may be gauged from the fact that Dante, in the *Purgatorio*, gives him the office of custodian of Purgatory (*Purgatorio*, I. 31 ff.). And this in spite of Cato's being a pagan, an enemy of Julius Caesar and a suicide—characteristics which are normally apt to land people in Dante's Hell.

through the eloquence of Cicero in the passage from his *De Fine Bonorum* where he says :

‘When Publius Decius, first of his family to be consul, wedded himself to death by charging with loosened rein into the ranks of the Latins, was he thinking of where or when he might receive pleasure, knowing that he was about to die, yet seeking death with more burning passion than Epicurus believes we should seek pleasure? But if his action had not been duly praised his son, in his fourth consulship, would never have imitated it. Nor would the son’s son have fallen in battle against Pyrrhus during his own consulship, the third generation of his family to sacrifice itself for the republic.’¹

And again in the *De Officiis* he says of Cato :

‘The situation of Marcus Cato was really no different from that of the others in Africa who surrendered to Caesar. Yet if the others had killed themselves it would perhaps have been counted a fault, because their morals were easier and their lives less austere; but since nature had endowed Cato with an incredibly powerful character that he himself had strengthened through the constancy with which he held to his every resolution, it was regarded as fitting for him to die rather than behold the face of the tyrant.’²

Thus two things have been demonstrated : first, that whoever seeks the public good has right as his goal; secondly, that the Roman people were seeking the public good in subjecting the world to themselves. And so the argument establishing our thesis is stated : whoever seeks right as his goal proceeds towards it by means of right; in subjecting the world to itself the Roman people had right as their end, as we have clearly proved already in this chapter; therefore the Roman people in subjecting the world used right as the means, and thus by right secured the Imperial dignity.

In order that this conclusion may be inferred from the premisses established we must prove the statement : ‘Whoever seeks right as his goal proceeds towards it by means of right.’ To make this clear we must observe that everything whatsoever is ordered towards some end; otherwise it would be superfluous, which is impossible, as we have

¹ *De Finibus*, II. 19.

² *De Officiis*, I. 112.

stated previously. And just as each thing has its appropriate end, likewise every end has some thing that is appropriate to it; hence it is impossible for two things, in themselves and in so far as they are two separate things, to have the same end; otherwise we should have the illogical position that one of them would be superfluous. Since, therefore, right must have an end, as we have stated, that end necessarily involves right, of which it is the appropriate effect. And since in any inference it is impossible to have an antecedent without its consequent (no concept of man without a concept of animal, for instance, as the method of composition and division reveals), it is impossible to seek the end of justice except by means of justice; since every thing is related to its end as consequent to antecedent it is impossible for the members to attain health except by healthy means. Therefore it is perfectly obvious that a person seeking the end of justice has to proceed justly. Nor is this invalidated by the objection usually cited by the Philosopher in regard to 'eubulia'; he says: 'It may happen that a sound conclusion is reached by a false syllogism, the middle term being equivocal.'¹ For if a true conclusion is ever in any way drawn from false premisses this is accidental, the truth being introduced by ambiguity in the terms; in itself truth never follows from falsehood, though words extrinsically true may very well follow from words intrinsically false. The same may happen in practical affairs; for a thief who gives aid to a poor man out of the proceeds of his thieving cannot be said to be giving alms, although the same act would be accounted almsgiving if what he gave were his own. So it is with the end of justice: any end claimed as the end of justice (i.e. the common good), yet obtained unjustly, could only be described as such in the same sense as a gift from ill-gotten gains may be described as alms. And since our argument

¹ *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI. 10; *εὐβούλια* means 'prudence', the right judgment by which a person reaches the good end he is aiming at.

refers to an actual and not only an apparent end of justice, the objection does not apply. Therefore what we sought to demonstrate is demonstrated.

VI

And it is just to preserve in being whatever nature has brought into being; for nature does not fall behind man in the matter of providence—if it did, then the effect would surpass the cause in goodness (which is impossible).

But it is common observation that when a corporation is being founded the founder is not only concerned with the relations of the members one to another but also with their capacity for exercising particular offices. In other words, he takes into account the limits of right within the corporation and in relation to the public order, for rights are limited by the capacity of their recipients. Furthermore, it is obvious that nature does not fall behind in its providential ordering of things. Hence the relationship that nature establishes amongst things is based upon their capacities, and this relationship is the basis of right. From which it follows that the natural order amongst things cannot be maintained except by right, for right is the essential basis of that order. Therefore right is necessary for the preservation of order.

The Roman people were ordained to rule by nature. This is shown as follows: just as an artist who simply considered the final form of his work but was negligent of the means to achieve it would be an imperfect artist, likewise nature would be imperfect if it were solely concerned to produce universal likeness to God throughout the universe, yet neglected the means towards it. But nature, being the work of the divine intellect, lacks no perfection; therefore it deliberately chooses every means towards the fulfilment of its intentions. Since mankind, then, has an end which is a necessary means for the fulfilment of nature's universal aim, nature must have deliberately chosen this end. Thus in the second book of his *De Naturali Auditu* the Philosopher

quite rightly shows that nature always acts with an end in view.¹ And since nature cannot attain this end by means of one man alone (because the tasks involved are many, and require a multitude of people to perform them) nature needs to produce a multiplicity of men each fitted for a different task. This diversity is the result of many factors, such as the influence of the stars, or the peculiar characteristics of the earth's regions. Thus we notice that not only individual men but also certain whole peoples are born to rule, whilst others are born to be ruled and serve, as the Philosopher argues in his *Politics*;² not only is it expedient for the latter to be ruled, it is actually just, even though they are forced to it. This being so, there can be no doubt that nature has ordained a place and a people designed to rule over the whole world; otherwise nature would have failed, which is impossible. What the place was, and which people it was, is obvious from what has been said above and will be shown below: Rome was the place, and its citizens the people.

This point is most subtly alluded to by our Poet in his sixth book, when he shows us Anchises admonishing Aeneas, the father of the Romans:

‘Others shall beat out the breathing bronze to a softer mould, I truly believe; they shall draw forth living features from the marble; they shall plead causes better, trace with their rod the movements of the heavens and tell of the rising stars. Roman, it is your task to bear dominion over the peoples. Such are your skills, to impose the custom of peace, to spare subject peoples and beat down the proud.’³

The location of the place he subtly refers to in the fourth book when he shows us Jove speaking as follows to Mercury:

‘Not such did his fairest mother promise us that he should be—that is not why she rescued him twice from Grecian swords—but in order that he might rule over Italy, pregnant with empire and trembling for war.’⁴

¹ *Physics*, II. 1.

³ *Aeneid*, VI. 847 ff.

² *Politics*, I. 5.

⁴ *Aeneid*, IV. 227 ff.

We have now shown convincingly that the Roman people were intended by nature to rule the world; therefore the Roman people in subjugating the world attained the Empire by right.

VII

If we are really going to hunt down the truth in this inquiry we must remember that the divine judgment upon human affairs is sometimes made plain to men and is sometimes hidden.

There are two modes in which the divine judgment may be manifested: by reason and by faith. For there are some divine pronouncements to which human reason can attain of its own power, as for instance that a man should risk death for the sake of his country. Because if the part should sacrifice itself for the sake of the whole, as the Philosopher asserts in his *Politics*,¹ and man is in a way part of his community, then a man ought to sacrifice himself for his country, preferring the greater to the lesser good. Hence the Philosopher's words to Nicomachus: 'It is good to give help to a single person, but better still and more divine to aid a people and the community.'² And this is the judgment of God; otherwise right reason would be out of harmony with nature's intentions—which is impossible. There are also judgments of God to which human reason on its own cannot attain, though it may be raised to an understanding of them by means of faith in the words of Sacred Scripture; for example, a person who has never heard of Christ and is therefore without the faith cannot be saved, no matter how perfectly he has acquired and practised the intellectual and moral virtues. Unaided human reason cannot see that this is just, but with the aid of faith it may. It is written in the Epistle to the Hebrews: 'Without faith it is impossible to please God';³ and in Leviticus: 'Any man of the house of Israel who shall slay an ox or a sheep or a goat in the camp

¹ *Politics*, I. 2.

² *Nicomachean Ethics*, I. 1.

³ *Heb.* xi. 6.

or outside the camp, and shall not bring it as an oblation to the door of the tabernacle, shall be guilty of blood.'¹ Here 'the door of the tabernacle' is a figure of the Christ, who is the door of the eternal assembly, as we may learn from the Gospel;² the slaughter of animals symbolizes human deeds.

But a hidden judgment of God is one that human reason sometimes reaches neither through the law of nature nor by way of scripture but through a special grace. This may happen in many different ways, sometimes by a simple revelation and sometimes by revelation through an ordeal.

The simple revelation happens in two ways: either by a spontaneous act of God or as a result of prayers. In the first case the revelation may be explicit, as in the judgment against Saul disclosed to Samuel,³ or it may be signified, as when it was revealed to Pharaoh by a sign that God had decided to liberate the children of Israel.⁴ A case of its resulting from prayer was known to the writer in the second book of the *Paralipomenon* who said: 'When we know not what we should do, our only help is to gaze upon Thee.'⁵ By means of an ordeal it may happen in two ways: either by lot or by contest (for 'to contest' is to put the matter to the test). That God's judgment is sometimes revealed by lot is obvious from the election of Matthew recorded in the Acts of the Apostles.⁶ A contest may reveal God's judgment in either of two ways: by a clash of strength (as in a duel between fighters, known as champions) or by several people challenging one another as to who shall arrive first at some goal (for instance, athletes running for a prize). The first way was foreshadowed amongst the Gentiles in that combat between Hercules and Antaeus which Lucan has recorded in the fourth book of the *Pharsalia*⁷ and Ovid in the ninth book of his *De Rerum Transmutatione*.⁸ The second was foreshadowed

¹ Lev. xvii. 3 ff.

² John, x. 7-9.

³ I Kings xv.

⁴ Exod. vii.

⁵ II *Paralipomenon*, xx. 12.

⁶ Acts, i. 26.

⁷ *Pharsalia*, IV. 597.

⁸ *Metamorphoses*, IX. 183 ff.

amongst the Gentiles by Atlanta and Hippomenes in the tenth book of the *De Rerum Transmutatione*.¹ Nor should we fail to notice that there are different rules governing these two types of contest, since in duels it is not unfair for the champions to obstruct each other, whereas in the other type of contest it is. Though our Poet seems to have thought otherwise when in his fifth book he gives the prize to Euryalus.² Here Cicero is better advised when he disallows such obstruction, in the third book of his *De Officiis*, supporting Chrysippus' sentiments: 'With the acuteness he so often displays Chrysippus states, "a person running in a race should strive with all his power to win, but he should never foul his opponent".'³

Having drawn these distinctions in the present chapter we may base two effective arguments upon them in favour of our thesis, one from the athletic contest and the other from the duel between champions. Each of them will be developed in turn in the following chapters.

VIII

Now when all the peoples were racing to secure control over the world, the people who won did so by divine decree. For since God is more deeply concerned with the issue of a universal contest than of any particular one, and we accept the result of particular contests as a divine judgment (citing the well-known proverb, 'May Peter bless the one to whom God has given victory'), there is no doubt that victory amongst those contending for world-empire must have been in accordance with God's judgment.

Of all those contending for world-empire it was the Roman people that prevailed: this will be obvious if we consider the competitors, and if we consider the prize or goal. The prize or goal was dominion over all mortals; this we call 'Empire'. But this was attained by none except the

¹ *Metamorphoses*, X. 560 ff.

Aeneid, V. 334 ff.

³ *De Officiis*, III. 10.

Roman people ; they were not merely the first to reach the goal, they were the only ones to do so, as we shall soon show. For the first amongst mortal men to aspire to this prize was Ninus, the king of the Assyrians ; for ninety years and more (so Orosius reports) he battled for dominion over the world, aided by his consort Semiramis, and did indeed conquer the whole of Asia ; yet the western parts of the world were never subject to him.¹ These two are mentioned by Ovid in his fourth book, when speaking of Piramus he says :

‘ Semiramis encircled the city with walls of brick’²
and a little later :

‘ They are to meet at the tomb of Ninus and to be hidden in its shade.’³

The second to aspire to this prize was Vesoges, king of Egypt ; and though Orosius records that he harried Asia to north and south, yet he did not even subdue one half of the world ; far from it, since the Scythians forced him to abandon his reckless pursuit when he was not even halfway between the starters and the finishing post.⁴ Then Cyrus, king of the Persians, made the attempt ; but having destroyed Babylon and transferred the Babylonian Empire to Persia he was forced to relinquish his ambition and his very life to Tamiris, the queen of the Scythians, without ever having seen the lands to the West.⁵

After these came Xerxes, the son of Darius and king of the Persians ; he swept over the world with such a host of nations and such power that he was able to throw a bridge over the strait dividing Europe from Asia, between Sestos and Abydos. This great feat was called to mind by Lucan in the second book of his *Pharsalia* ; thus he proclaims :

‘ Fame tells of the proud Xerxes, who built a path across the seas.’⁶

¹ Orosius, *History*, I. 4.

² *Metamorphoses*, IV. 58.

³ *Metamorphoses*, IV. 88.

⁴ Orosius, *History*, I. 14.

⁵ Orosius, *History*, II. 6

⁶ *Pharsalia*, II. 672 ff.

Yet in the end he was ignominiously flung back on his tracks, and failed to attain the prize. In addition, after these came Alexander, the Macedonian king. He came nearest of all to bearing off the palm of monarchy; he had already sent legates to the Romans warning them to surrender, when (as Livy relates) he collapsed midway along his course, in Egypt, before the Romans even had time to reply.¹ His tomb is still preserved there, as Lucan testifies in his eighth book when he scornfully addresses Ptolemy, the king of Egypt:

‘Last and degenerate offspring of Lagus’ stock, you are soon to perish and surrender the sceptre to your incestuous sister, even though you preserve the Macedonian in a consecrated cave.’²

‘O, depth of the wisdom and knowledge of God’,³ who would not grow silent before thee, who, to put an end to his headlong flight, snatched Alexander from the race when in that race he tried to trip his rival, the Roman.

But the proofs that Rome carried off the palm in this great contest are many. As our Poet says in his first book:

‘Surely [you have promised that] one day, as the years roll onwards, there shall spring from Roman stock, from Teucer’s reanimated blood, leaders who shall hold the sea and every land beneath their sway.’⁴

Furthermore Lucan in his first book writes:

‘The kingdom is divided by the sword, and the destiny of the mighty people who rule sea, lands and all the earth allows no room for a rival.’⁵

And Boethius in his second book, describing the prince of the Romans, says:

‘He ruled with his sceptre the peoples whom Phoebus gazes upon as he plunges his rays beneath the waves and as he rises again

¹ This story is not to be found in Livy. Nor did Alexander die in Egypt, but in Babylon. His tomb, however, was in Alexandria. Dante must have assumed, because his tomb was there, that he died there.

² *Pharsalia*, VIII. 692 ff.

⁴ *Aeneid*, I. 234 ff.

³ *Rom.* xi. 33.

⁵ *Pharsalia*, I. 109 ff.

in the extreme East, the peoples oppressed by the Northern cold, and those whom the fierce South wind scorches with its withering heat, baking the burning sands.' ¹

Like testimony is provided by Christ's Evangelist, Luke, who always speaks the truth; for in one passage we read: 'There went out an edict from Caesar Augustus, that the whole world should be enrolled.' ² From these words we can clearly perceive that the Romans then exercised jurisdiction over the whole world.

From all of which it is plain that the Roman people triumphed over all its rivals in the competition for world-empire; thus it triumphed by divine decree, thus it won the crown with divine assent; its victory was based upon right.

IX

Again, whatever is acquired by duel is acquired by right. For wherever human judgment is lacking, either because it is wrapped in the darkness of ignorance or simply because no judge is available, we must avoid dereliction of justice by having recourse to Him who loved justice so dearly that He shed his own blood and died to satisfy its demands; hence the psalm: 'Just is the Lord, and He has loved just things.' ³

A duel takes place when, with the free assent of both sides, neither through hatred nor through love but solely out of concern for justice, the judgment of God is invoked in a struggle engaging the forces of both soul and body. We call such a struggle a duel because it was originally devised as a combat between individuals. Nevertheless we must be extremely careful never to have recourse to the duel except when every other avenue towards a just settlement has proved fruitless and we are, so to speak, driven to this ultimate remedy by the need for justice—in the same way that under the threat of war all forms of negotiation should be tried before resorting to battle (an opinion strongly maintained by both Cicero and Vegetius, the former in his

¹ *De Consolatione*, II.

² Luke, ii. 1.

³ Ps. x. 8.

*De Officiis*¹ and the latter in the *De Re Militari*²). Similarly in medical treatment every possible remedy must be tried before employing fire and steel, which are a last resort. A duel, then, has two essential features ; the one we have just discussed and the other we touched upon previously, which is, that the combatants entering the arena should not be motivated either by hatred or by love but by a common concern for justice. That is why Cicero's comment on this point is so sensible : 'but wars intended to secure the crown of empire should be waged the less bitterly.'³ But if these features of the duel are observed (and without them we cannot rightly call it a duel) is it not true that those who have met by common consent, at the bidding of justice and through concern for justice, have met in the name of God? And if so, is He not in the midst of them, as He himself promised in the Gospel?⁴ And if God is present, would it not be impious to imagine that justice might founder, despite the fact He loves it as dearly as we have shown above? And if justice does not founder in the duel, are not the victor's gains acquired by right? Even the pagans appreciated this truth long before the proclamation of the Gospel, when they invoked the result of the duel as a judgment. Hence the fine reply of Pyrrhus—that generous heir to the blood and manners of the Aecidae—when Roman ambassadors were sent to him to ransom prisoners :

'I have no desire for gold, nor shall I accept payment ; let us decide this matter of life and death by the sword, and not with gold—as warriors, and not as hucksters of war. Let valour be the test of our lot, whether Hera wishes you or me to rule. Know that I shall respect the liberty of those whose valour has been spared in the fortune of war. I give them to you ; take them.'⁵

¹ *De Officiis*, I. 11, 34.

² *De Re Militari*, III. 9.

³ *De Officiis*, I. 12, 38.

⁴ Matt. xviii. 19.

⁵ These lines are from the sixth book of the *Annales*, a history of Rome written in hexameters by Ennius (239-169 B.C.); they were known to Dante through Cicero's quoting them (*De Officiis*, I. 12).

Thus spoke Pyrrhus ; and by 'Hera' he meant fortune, the power which we more properly and exactly call 'divine providence'. So let combatants beware not to make payment their motive, because then their contest would not merit the title of duel. It would be an auction of blood and injustice, for the arbiter would not be God, but the ancient adversary who instigated the conflict. If the combatants do not wish to become traffickers in blood and injustice let them keep the example of Pyrrhus before their eyes when entering the arena ; for as we have pointed out, he spurned the aid of gold even in the struggle for Empire. It is frequently urged ¹ against the truth we have established here that it makes no allowance for differences in strength ; this objection is refuted by David's victory over Goliath.² And if pagans do not accept that as a refutation they have another in Hercules' victory over Antaeus.³ It is extremely stupid to suppose that a power sustained by God might prove weaker than an ordinary combatant.

This proves quite convincingly that what is won in a duel is won by right.

X

But the Roman people secured the Empire by means of a duel. This is proved by many trustworthy witnesses, and the evidence confirming it will further reveal that controversies were decided by duel from the earliest days of the Roman Empire.

The first occasion of conflict arose over the abode of father Aeneas, the first founder of this people. He was opposed by Turnus, the king of the Rutuli, and the two kings together agreed to let the issue be decided by divine judgment, by single combat, as we are told in the last book

¹ By St. Thomas Aquinas, for instance : *Summa Theologica*, II-II. Q. 95, art. viii.

² I Kings xvii.

³ Antaeus, son of Poseidon and Ge, was a giant whom Hercules crushed to death.

of the *Aeneid*.¹ So profound was the mercy of the victorious Aeneas, as the final verses of our Poet declare, that he would have granted both life and peace to his vanquished opponent had he not glimpsed the belt that Turnus had taken from Pallas when he killed him.² Again, when the Trojan family in Italy branched into two distinct peoples, the Roman and the Alban, and a running quarrel sprang up between them for the standard of the eagle and the household gods of Troy, both sides finally agreed to settle the matter by combat. The three Horatii brothers on one side, and the three Curiatii brothers on the other, fought it out under the tense gaze of their respective kings and peoples; and when the three Alban champions and two of the Romans had been slain the palm of victory passed to the Romans under King Hostilius. The story is told in detail by Livy,³ and Orosius confirms it.⁴ Livy also tells how they fought with neighbouring peoples for the crown of empire, with the Sabines and then with the Samnites; the rules of warfare were strictly adhered to, and they observed the form of the duel, though with whole companies as champions.⁵ In the struggle with the Samnites Fortune almost took back what she had promised, a fact cited by Lucan in his second book:

‘How many bodies lay heaped alongside the Colline Gate at the moment when dominion over the world and control of its affairs came near to changing hands and being transferred elsewhere; when the Samnite inflicted more wounds on Rome than all the Caudine Forks.’⁶

But even when the disputes between Italians had been settled the trial by divine judgment was not yet complete, since both the Greeks and Carthaginians were competitors for the Empire. Thus Fabricius for the Romans and Pyrrhus for the Greeks fought it out, supported by hosts of soldiers;

¹ *Aeneid*, XII. 693 ff.

² *Aeneid*, XII. 940 ff.

³ Livy, I. 24 ff.

⁴ Orosius, *History*, II. 4.

⁵ Livy, VII. 26 ff.

⁶ *Pharsalia*, II. 135 ff.

and Rome won. Again the war between Scipio at the head of the Italians and Hannibal at the head of the Africans took the form of a duel, the Africans going down before the Italians, as Livy and other Roman writers are at pains to show.

Is there anyone so obtuse as not to see how it was by right of the duel that the glorious people acquired the crown of the whole world? A Roman might well have made his own those words of St. Paul to Timothy: 'there is laid up for me a crown of justice';¹ 'laid up' referring to the eternal providence of God.

Now let the presumptuous jurists² realize how far they are below that watch-tower of reason from which the human mind gazes out upon these abiding principles; let them be silent, content to give their counsel and judgment without reading their own opinions into the law.

And now it has been proved that the Roman people acquired the Empire by means of the duel, and therefore by right. That is the principal thesis of this book. So far the thesis has been established by numerous arguments based on rational principles; henceforward it must be established in a new mode, on the principles of the Christian faith.

XI

It is those who boast of being defenders of the Christian faith who have 'murmured' most against the Roman primacy, 'meditating vain things'. These same people have no pity on Christ's poor, whom they rob not only by taking church revenues but by daily plundering the very patrimony of the Church. The Church is impoverished whilst they make a pretence of justice as a means of excluding the very dispenser of justice. Nor can the element of divine judgment

¹ II Tim. iv. 8.

² The jurists in question are not the commentators on the Civil Law but the commentators on Canon Law, the hated Decretalists, who sought to minimize the Emperor's power.

be excluded from such impoverishment, since the Church's riches are used neither to help the poor—who may claim them as their patrimony—nor administered with gratitude towards the Emperor who provided them.¹ Let them be given back where they came from; the benefit of the gift has been repaid with harm, for though given in a right spirit it has been unjustly administered. What is all this to such ministers? What does it matter to them that the Church's substance is being wasted so long as it swells the estates of their own relatives? But perhaps it is better to continue with our argument, meanwhile in pious silence awaiting the succour of Our Saviour.

I say, therefore, that if the Roman Empire was not founded upon right then Christ, by his birth, assented to an injustice. The consequent is false: therefore the contradictory of the antecedent is true (since contradictory propositions imply each other by negation). There is no need to show believers that the consequent is false; for any believer will immediately acknowledge its falsity; anyone who does not acknowledge it is no believer, and if he is not a believer this present argument is not addressed to him. I prove the argument to be logically valid in the following manner: if anyone of his own free will observes an edict he gives support to the conviction that it is just; and since deeds are more convincing than words (as the Philosopher maintains at the end of his *Ethics*²) a person's deeds are a more convincing token of approval even than his words. But, as his biographer Luke relates, Christ³ chose to be born

¹ This is a reference to the Donation of Constantine. The first Christian Emperor, Constantine (274–337), was supposed to have given extensive temporal rights to Pope Sylvester I. Both Imperialists and Papalists accepted the document purporting to record the Donation as genuine, though some denied Constantine's right to have made the Donation. It was Lorenzo Valla, the Italian humanist, who in 1440 demonstrated that the document was not genuine.

² *Nicomachean Ethics*, X. 1.

³ Luke ii. 1.

of a Virgin Mother under the edict of Roman authority so that the Son of God, by becoming man, might be enrolled as a man in that unique register of the human race; this meant that he recognized its validity. (Though it might be more fitting to suppose that God himself prompted Caesar to issue the edict, so that He whom mortal men had longed for throughout the ages might personally enlist himself in their company.) Hence Christ demonstrated by deed that the edict promulgated by Caesar exercising the Roman people's authority was just. And since a just edict cannot be issued without due jurisdiction it follows that a person who approves an edict as just also approves its jurisdiction; but this jurisdiction would be unjust unless established by right.

And it must be noted that the argument invoked to invalidate the consequent, although accepted in this form in many logical texts, shows itself really compelling if we translate it into a syllogism of the second figure and then reduce it to a syllogism of the first figure with its antecedent unchanged. This reduction would then read: 'Every unjust action is approved unjustly; Christ never gave approval unjustly; therefore He never gave approval to injustice.' If we retain the antecedent, it reads: 'Every unjust action is unjustly approved; Christ approved certain unjust actions; therefore Christ approved unjustly.'

XII

And if the Roman Empire was not based upon right, Adam's sin was not punished in Christ; but this is untrue; therefore the contradictory of the statement from which it follows is true.

The falsity of the consequent is revealed thus: since we were all sinners by the death of Adam (in the Apostle's words: 'As by one man sin entered into this world, and through sin, death, so death entered into all men, in that

all sinned¹), so if satisfaction for that sin had not been made by the death of Christ all of us would still be children of wrath by nature, i.e. by our corrupted nature. But this is not the case, for the Apostle in writing to the Ephesians says of the Father:

‘He has predestined us, by the decree of His will, to be His adopted children through Jesus Christ. Thus manifesting the splendour of that grace by which He has taken us into His favour in the person of His beloved Son. It is in Him, and through His blood, that we enjoy redemption, the forgiveness of our sins. So rich is God’s grace that has overflowed upon us in a full stream of wisdom and discernment.’²

Likewise in St. John’s Gospel Christ himself is referring to the suffering He is enduring when He says: ‘It is finished.’³ Now when a thing is finished nothing else remains to be done.

To avoid misunderstanding it must be realized that ‘punishment’ does not simply mean the penalty inflicted on the wrongdoer but that penalty when it is inflicted by one with right to punish; so that if a penalty is inflicted by anyone other than the appropriate judge it should not be described as punishment but as injury. That is why Moses said: ‘Who has appointed you judge over us?’⁴ Therefore if Christ had not suffered under the appropriate judge that penalty would not have been a punishment. No judge could be accounted appropriate unless he had jurisdiction over the whole of mankind, since it was the whole of mankind that was to be punished in the flesh of Christ who, as the Prophet says, ‘was bearing our sorrows’.⁵ And Tiberius Caesar, whose representative was Pilate, would not have had jurisdiction over the whole of mankind unless the Roman Empire were founded upon right! This is why Herod (though just as ignorant of what he was doing as Caiaphas⁶

¹ Rom. v. 12.

² Eph. i. 5 ff.

³ John xix. 30.

⁴ Exod. ii. 14.

⁵ Isa. liii. 4.

⁶ This refers to Caiaphas’ statement ‘it is expedient that one man should die for the people.’ (John xi. 50.)

was when he spoke the truth about the heavenly judgment) handed Christ back to Pilate to be judged, as Luke relates in his Gospel.¹ For Herod did not represent Tiberius in the exercise either of the Imperial or senatorial power ; he was simply appointed by Tiberius as king over a particular kingdom and his authority was restricted to that kingdom.

And so let those who make themselves out to be sons of the Church stop their attacks upon the Roman Empire, seeing that the Bridegroom Christ acknowledged it at the beginning and at the end of His warfare on earth. And I now consider it sufficiently proved that the Roman people acquired the Empire of the world by right.

O happy people, O glorious Ausonia!² if only the one who weakened the Empire had never been born or had never been misled by his own pious intentions! ³

¹ Luke xxiii. 11.

² *Ausonia* is a poetic name for Italy ; and Dante's use of this name here has given rise to speculation whether Roman and Italian were interchangeable for him ; whether he was a forerunner of Italian nationalism, etc. These speculations are discussed by D'Entrèves in *Dante as a Political Thinker*, and by B. H. Sumner, in 'Dante the "Regnum Italicum"' (*Medium Aevum*, Vol. I, 1932).

³ Another reference to the Donation of Constantine.

BOOK THREE

I

‘HE shut the mouths of the lions and they did not harm me, for I was found just in His sight.’¹

At the beginning of this work it was proposed, as far as the subject permits it, to deal with three issues ; the first two have been sufficiently dealt with, I believe, in the preceding books. It now remains to deal with the third, and since the truth about it can scarcely be brought to light without putting certain people to shame,² it may give rise to anger against me. But since Truth from its immutable throne requires it, and since Solomon entering the forest of Proverbs³ teaches us, by his words and his proposal to carry them out, to meditate on the truth and to scorn impious men, and since that master of mortals, the Philosopher, urges us to abandon friendship for the sake of truth,⁴ I take courage from the words of Daniel, quoted above, assuring us that defenders of the truth are shielded by divine power ; and in accordance with the exhortation of St. Paul I put on the breastplate of faith,⁵ and, on fire with the burning coal which one of the Seraphim took from the altar of heaven to touch Isaias’ lips with,⁶ I will now enter this arena, and in the strength of Him who liberated us from the powers of darkness by His very blood, and before the gaze of the whole world I shall

¹ Dan. vi. 22.

² i.e. those who make exaggerated claims on behalf of the Papacy.

³ cf. Prov. viii. 7.

⁴ *Nicomachean Ethics*, I. 4.

⁵ I Thess. v. 8.

⁶ Isa. vi. 7.

fling the impious and the liar out of the arena. And why should I fear, when the Spirit, who is coeternal with the Father and the Son, promised through the mouth of David: 'The just shall be held in everlasting remembrance, and shall have nothing to fear from evil report'? ¹ 1

The present question, therefore, that we have now to investigate turns upon the relations between two great luminaries,² the Roman Pope and the Roman Prince. And the issue is whether the authority of the Roman Monarch (who is Monarch of the world by right, as we have proved in the second book) is immediately dependent on God, or whether his authority comes indirectly from some other, a vicar or minister of God (I am referring to the successor of Peter), who is entrusted with the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

II

In solving this question the same procedure will be followed as with the previous ones: to adopt a principle conclusive enough to support the arguments that are to reveal the truth. For without a firm principle what purpose is served by striving, however sincerely, to speak the truth? For the principle is the sole basis for the minor premisses that are to be introduced.

Let the indisputable truth posited be this: that God does

¹ Ps. cxi. 7.

² The two great luminaries are the sun and the moon, whose creation is described in Gen. i. 16. It was customary for the Papalists to take the greater luminary, the sun, as a symbol for the Papacy, and the lesser luminary, the moon, as a symbol of the Empire; from this they argued that the Emperor's power was derived from the Pope's in the same way as the moon derives its light from the sun. Though Dante skilfully refutes this manner of arguing he was clearly worried by it; so much so that in the *Purgatorio* (XVI. 107 ff.) he speaks of two *suns*, which light the way of man in the world and in divine things respectively. Cf. Letter V, 10, and Letter VI, 2.

not approve anything contrary to nature's intentions. For if this were not true then its contradictory would not be false, but its contradictory is: that God does not disapprove anything contrary to nature's intentions. And if this last proposition is not false, neither are the conclusions that follow from it, since it is impossible in a logical deduction for the conclusion to be false if the premiss is not. But 'not disapproving' necessarily implies one of two things, either 'approving' or 'not approving'; just as the necessary consequence of 'not hating' is either 'loving' or 'not loving' (though 'not loving' is not necessarily 'hating' any more than 'not approving' is 'disapproving', as is obvious). Thus if these conclusions are not false neither will this statement be false: 'God approves what He does not approve'; and nothing could be more completely false than this. And so I now go on to show that this is in fact the case: it is obvious that God approves the purpose of nature, otherwise the movements of the heavens would be in vain; which is unthinkable. If God approved an obstruction of the purpose He would approve the purpose of the obstruction; otherwise His approval would be meaningless. And since the purpose of the obstruction is that the thing obstructed should fail to be, it would follow that God approves there not being a purpose to nature—the contradictory of what was first stated. But if God did not approve the obstruction of the purpose, in so far as He did not approve it, it would follow that He did not care whether there was or was not an obstruction. But if a person does not care whether there is an obstruction; not to hold in one's approval is the same as not to approve. And so if the purpose of nature may be obstructed (and it may), it necessarily follows that God does not approve the purpose of nature; which means that God approves what He does not approve.

The principle, then, from whose contradictory such absurdities follow is absolutely true.

III

In addressing ourselves to this question we must mention that the truth about the first question needed explaining rather to dissipate ignorance than to settle a dispute. But with the second question the ignorance and the disputes present almost equal difficulties. There are many things of which we are ignorant, yet about which we do not quarrel; the geometrician, for example, does not know how to square the circle, but he does not dispute about it; nor does the theologian know how many angels there are, but he does not make this an occasion for quarrelling; the Egyptian, similarly, is ignorant of Scythian civilization yet does not wrestle with the question whether the Scythians are civilized. But in determining the truth of this third question we have to face both ignorance and quarrelling; for whereas it is ignorance that usually gives rise to quarrels in the other questions, here it is rather the quarrels that cause the ignorance. It is always the case with men whose will runs ahead of their rational insight that their affections become perverted through their having put the light of reason behind them, and they are then drawn along by these affections like blind men who obstinately deny their blindness. Thus very often not only is the kingdom of their own souls invaded by error but they in turn transgress the bounds of their own territories and come rioting within other people's settlements. Here, since they understand nothing, nothing they say is understood; consequently they provoke some people to anger, some to indignation and not a few to laughter.

Now there are in the main three classes of men who resist the truth on this issue. The first class includes the Supreme Pontiff, Vicar of Our Lord Jesus Christ and successor to Peter (to whom we should render not what is due to Christ but what is due to Peter), and certain pastors of the Christian flock. Perhaps it is through his zeal for the keys that the former opposes the truth I am to demonstrate

and I well believe that the latter are motivated solely by zeal for Mother Church. As I have said, this class may be inspired by zeal rather than pride. But there is a second class whose obstinate greed has extinguished the light of reason ; though they profess themselves to be sons of the Church¹ they have the Devil for their father ;² and they not only stir up strife on this issue but even hate the very name of the most sacred principality, and blatantly deny the principles upon which it is founded and on which our previous investigations are based. Then there is a third class, known as the Decretalists, who are totally ignorant of both theology and philosophy ; relying entirely upon the Decretals, to which they have devoted all their skill (and to which I myself pay proper respect), they imagine—so I believe—that the force of the Decretals justifies their attacks upon the Empire. Nor am I surprised, having heard some of them saying, indeed loudly maintaining, that the faith is founded upon the traditions of the Church. May such impiety be erased from men's minds through the intervention of those who, previous to these traditions, believed that Christ the Son of God was to come, or believed when He came or after He had suffered, and believing hoped, and hoping burned with love, and in their burning love (as no one doubts) were made co-heirs with Christ. And in order to clear this third class out of the arena immediately we must point out that some Scriptures are found previous to the Church, some at the Church's birth, and some subsequent to it. Previous to the Church are the Old and New Testaments, which are 'established for eternity' as the Prophet says ;³ for this is what the Church

¹ These are the temporal rulers, kings and princes, who oppose the Empire. It was their boast that they were 'Sons of the Church'.

² John viii. 44 : 'You belong to your father, that is, the devil, and are eager to gratify the appetites which are your father's. He, from the first, was a murderer ; and as for truth, he has never taken his stand upon that ; there is no truth in him.'

³ Ps. cx. 8.

says in speaking to the Bridegroom: 'Draw me after Thee.'¹ Contemporaneous with the Church are those venerated principal Councils² at which no one doubts Christ to have been present because we have it upon the testimony of Matthew that He himself said to the disciples as He was about to ascend into heaven: 'Behold, I am with you always, even to the consummation of time.'³ In addition there are the writings of the Doctors, St. Augustine and others, and if anyone doubts that they were prompted by the Holy Spirit either he has never seen the fruits of their work or, if he has seen them, has not tasted them. Afterwards came the traditions known as *Decretals*; although their apostolic origin entitles these to veneration there is no doubt that we must give them a lower place than the fundamental Scriptures, since Christ castigated the priests for doing the opposite. For when they demanded of Him: 'Why do your disciples transgress the traditions of the ancients?'—they had omitted the washing of hands—Christ replied (so Matthew tells us): 'And why do you transgress God's command for the sake of your tradition?';⁴ by which He clearly indicates the inferior status of tradition. Since it has been shown that the Church's traditions are subsequent to the Church, it follows that the Church does not derive its authority from the traditions but that the traditions derive their authority from the Church. And so those who only have traditions to support them must be kept out of the arena, as we have said before; it is essential for those who are pursuing this truth to go to the sources from which the authority of the Church is derived. Once the former have been excluded we must also exclude those others who, though covered in

¹ Canticle i. 3, the bride being the Church and Christ the Bridegroom.

² The Councils of Nicaea (325), Constantinople (381), Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451).

³ Matt. xxviii. 20.

⁴ Matt. xv. 2 ff.

crows' feathers, come prancing into the flock of the Lord like white sheep. These are the sons of impiety who to further their profligacy prostitute their Mother, drive out their brothers, and finally refuse to recognize any judge. Why, then, should our argument be directed towards them when they are so firmly in the grip of their own greed that they cannot even see first principles?

Which means that our dispute is restricted to those who are motivated by a certain zeal for Mother Church yet miss the very truth at issue. It is these whom I engage in argument for the cause of truth¹ in this book, trusting in that piety which a reverent son owes to his father, which a reverent son owes to his mother, full moreover of reverence for the Church and reverence for its pastor, as well as for all who profess the Christian faith.

IV

The argument henceforward will be addressed exclusively to those who maintain that the authority of the Empire depends upon the authority of the Church, just as the lowly craftsman depends upon the architect. In support of their opinion they allege many and diverse arguments, some drawn from sacred Scripture and some from the deeds both of Pope and Emperor; occasionally they even try to invoke reason in their favour.

Firstly they say that according to the Scriptures (in Genesis²) God made two great luminaries, a greater one and a smaller one, the first to govern the day and the second to govern the night; these statements they interpret allegorically as referring to the two kinds of power, the spiritual and the temporal. They go on to argue that just as the lesser luminary, the moon, has no light except what it receives from the sun, similarly the temporal has no authority except what it receives from the spiritual power.

So as to refute this and all their other arguments we must

¹ Cf. *Nicomachean Ethics*, I. 4.

² Gen. i. 16.

remember what the Philosopher asserts in his *De Sophisticis Elenchis*: 'To refute an argument is to expose an error.'¹ And because the error may be either in the matter or in the form of the argument the fault may be made in one of two ways—either through a false premiss or through an invalid syllogism. Both these charges were made against Parmenides and Melissus by the Philosopher, who said: 'They make false premisses and invalid syllogisms.'² And here I use 'false' in a broad sense, applying it also to anything improbable (which is equivalent to falsehood when the question is one of probability). But if the error is a formal one then in order to refute the argument one has to question the conclusion by showing that the proper form of the syllogism has not been observed. But if the error is a material one it is because the premiss taken is totally false or false in a certain respect. If totally false, then the argument is refuted by demolishing the premiss; if it is false in a certain respect then it is refuted by introducing distinctions.

Once this is grasped the next point to bear in mind, in order to appreciate this refutation and the following ones better, is that errors concerning the mystical sense may be committed in two ways: either by looking for it where it does not exist, or by interpreting it as it ought not to be interpreted. Referring to the first, Augustine in his *De Civitate Dei* says: 'Not every happening that is recorded need be taken as significant, for even those not significant may be included for the sake of those which are. Only the ploughshare actually cleaves the soil, but the other parts of the plough are also necessary for this to happen.'³ Referring to the second, the same Doctor in his *Doctrina Christiana* says of the person who tries to give the Scriptures a sense different from that intended by the writer: 'He makes the

¹ *De Sophisticis Elenchis*, II. 3.

² Parmenides of Elia, born about 510 B.C.; Melissus of Samos, disciple of Parmenides.

³ *De Civitate Dei*, XVI. 2.

same mistake as a person who leaves the main road and then only after a long detour reaches the place to which the road was leading'; and he adds: 'This must be pointed out to him in case this habit of deviating leads him to take the wrong road or go off at a tangent.' Then he indicates the reason why this is to be avoided in dealing with the Scriptures: 'Faith will waver if the authority of the sacred Scriptures is shaken.'¹ But I say that if a person makes such mistakes through ignorance he should be firmly corrected and then pardoned, just as one pardons a person who fears a lion in the clouds. With those who deliberately commit such errors, however, there is no other course but to treat them as one would treat tyrants who do not maintain the constitution for the common benefit but try to pervert it for their own ends. What an unsurpassed crime—though it were committed only in dreams—to abuse the intention of the Holy Spirit! It is not against Moses that they are sinning, nor against David, nor Job, nor Matthew, nor Paul, but against the Holy Spirit speaking through them. For although those who write down the divine word are many they all do so at the dictation of the one God who has condescended to display His good pleasure towards us by employing the pens of many people.

Now that these preliminaries have been settled, we can return to the matter in hand, and I straightway refute the proposition of those who say the two luminaries are allegorically meant as types of the two kinds of government; the whole strength of their argument lies in this proposition. How utterly impossible it is to accept this interpretation may be shown in two ways. Firstly from the fact that such governments do not constitute the essence of man, and are therefore accidental to him; and so it would seem that God followed a perverse order in producing accidents before producing their proper subject (and to say this of God is absurd), because these two luminaries were produced on the

¹ *De Doctrina Christiana*, I. 36 ff.

fourth day and man on the sixth, as the Scripture tells us.¹ Moreover, as we shall go on to show, those governments have a directive function for man, guiding him to certain ends; therefore if man had remained in the state of innocence in which God made him he would not have needed these directives, since they are remedies for the weakness of sin.² But since man was not only no sinner on the fourth day but did not even exist yet, to have afforded a remedy would have been a superfluous act—which is contrary to the divine goodness. He would indeed be a stupid doctor who prepared a plaster for an abscess on a person not yet born. Therefore it is forbidden to say that God constituted these two governments on the fourth day, consequently Moses did not mean what they pretend he meant. This lie must also be exposed for what it is in a more tolerant fashion; for it is more tolerant to refute one's adversary by drawing a distinction, because then he is not made to appear to be utterly lying, as happens when one simply demolishes his assumption.

So I say that although the moon receives its fulness of light from the sun alone, it does not follow that the moon is derived from the sun. Thus it should be recognized that the existence of the moon is one thing, its powers another and its operation yet another. The moon does not in any way depend upon the sun—as far as its existence is concerned, nor as far as its powers are concerned, nor with regard to its operation as such. Because its movement arises from its own operation, its influence from the power of its own rays; it is even the source of some of its own light, as is obvious during its eclipse. But in order to operate more effectively and powerfully it receives something from the sun, i.e. abundant light; having received this, its power is

¹ Gen. i. 14 ff., 26 ff.

² Before the Fall man, in a state of utter responsiveness to the divine will, lived in complete harmony with all creation. External directives only became necessary when the interior harmony had been destroyed by the Fall.

increased. Similarly I say that temporal government does not owe its existence to the spiritual government, nor its power (which constitutes its authority), nor even its operation as such—though it certainly receives from the spiritual government the energy to operate more powerfully, by the light of grace which God infuses into it in heaven and which is dispensed to it on earth by the Supreme Pontiff. Hence the argument contains a formal error, because the predicate in the conclusion is not identical with the predicate in the major premiss, as we can see. In other words, the argument runs: the moon derives light from the sun, which is spiritual government: temporal government is the moon: therefore temporal government derives its authority from spiritual government. For the term employed in the major is 'light', whereas the predicate in the conclusion is 'authority'; but these refer to different subjects and have different meanings, as we have seen.

V

They even draw an argument from the text of Moses,¹ saying that from Jacob's loins sprang a prefiguration of these two governments, that is Levi and Judah; the first being the father of the priesthood and the second the father of temporal government. From this they argue: as Levi was related to Judah, so is the Church related to the Empire. In regard to their birth Levi came before Judah, as the text shows; therefore the Church comes before the Empire in the matter of authority.

And this may quite easily be refuted. As in the previous case I might refute it by simply denying their statement that

¹ Gen. xxix. 34 ff. Vinay points out that this argument is not to be found in the writings of the Papal publicists of the time; this confirms him in a suspicion he has frequently entertained, that Dante's knowledge of these publicists was not very profound, and that he often refutes allegories on which they laid scarcely any stress (e.g. *Mon.* III. vii.).

Levi and Judah symbolize the two types of government; but let so much be granted. When they argue, however, that 'just as Levi comes first in regard to birth, so the Church comes first in authority', I repeat that the predicate of the conclusion is one thing and the predicate of the major premiss another; for 'authority' and 'birth' differ in both their subject and their signification; hence the reasoning contains a formal error. The reasoning runs like this: A comes before B in C; D is to E as A to B; therefore D comes before E in F. But F and C are different. And if they reply that F follows from C, that is, authority from seniority, and that the consequent may therefore be substituted for the antecedent (as 'animal' may for 'man'), I say this is false. For many who are senior by birth not only do not come first in authority but actually come after younger men —as, for example, when archdeacons are older in years than their bishops. And so one can see that the objection errs by taking as a cause what is not, in fact, a cause.

VI

From the text of the first book of Kings¹ they cite the election and deposition of Saul, and say that the text clearly shows Saul to have been raised to the throne and deposed from the throne by Samuel who was acting as God's vicar at God's command. And they argue from this that just as he had the power to bestow and take away temporal government and transfer it to another, being God's vicar, so God's present vicar, the head of the universal Church, has the authority to bestow, take away and even transfer the sceptre of temporal government. From which it would undoubtedly follow, as they claim, that the authority of the Empire depends upon the Church.

This argument is refuted by denying their statement that Samuel was the vicar of God, since he performed that act not as vicar of God but as a legate on a special mission or a

¹ I Kings x. 1.

messenger bearing a specific command from God ; which is obvious from the fact that he did nothing and recounted nothing except what God told him to do. But we must bear in mind that it is one thing to be a vicar and another to be a messenger or minister ; just as it is one thing to be a Doctor of the Church and another to be his interpreter. For a vicar is a person commissioned to exercise jurisdiction either in accordance with the law or according to his own discretion ; therefore so long as he does not exceed the bounds of the jurisdiction entrusted to him, he can apply the law on his own discretion to matters of which his lord has no knowledge. But a messenger in his capacity as messenger may not do so ; for just as a hammer operates solely by virtue of the smith, similarly the messenger's function depends entirely upon the will of the person who commissions him. Thus if God did raise and dispose Saul through His messenger, Samuel, it does not follow that the vicar of God can do the same. God has done many things through His angels, as He still does and will do in future, which the vicar of God, Peter's successor, cannot do. Their argument proceeds from the whole to the part in the following manner : man can hear and see ; therefore the eye can hear and see. But this is invalid ; though the inference is valid in its negative form : man cannot fly ; therefore man's arms cannot fly. Similarly, as Agathon pointed¹ out : God by His messenger cannot make what has happened not to have happened ; neither, therefore, can His vicar do so.

VII

They also cite the passage in St. Matthew² about the offerings of the Magi, saying that Christ received both frankincense and gold to signify that He was lord and

¹ *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI. 2. Agathon (circa 447-400 B.C.) was an Athenian tragic poet. He was a friend of Euripides and the banquet described in Plato's *Symposium* was held in his honour.

² Matt. ii. 11.

governor of both spiritual and temporal matters; from which they argue that the vicar of Christ is equally lord and governor of both, and consequently has authority over each of them.

In reply I admit that the literal and symbolic sense they attach to this passage in St. Matthew is correct, but I deny the conclusions they try to draw from it. Their syllogism runs as follows: God is the lord of spiritual and temporal things: the Supreme Pontiff is the vicar of God; therefore he is the lord of spiritual and temporal things. Each of the premisses is true, but the middle term is not the same and so the argument contains four terms; this violates the syllogistic form, as is shown in the *Prior Analytics*.¹ For the subject in the major premiss, 'God', is different from the predicate in the minor, which is 'the vicar of God'. And it would be a futile objection for anyone to maintain that the vicar is the same thing; for no vicariate, whether human or divine, can be equivalent to the authority from which it originates—as is easily seen. To take one example, we know that Peter's successor does not enjoy divine authority in regard to the workings of nature; for he could not make the earth rise or fire descend by virtue of the office entrusted to him. Nor could God entrust him with all and every power, for God could in no way endow him with the power to create, nor the power to baptize—as is quite evident, although the Master² has asserted the opposite opinion in his fourth book. We also know that being a man's vicar does not make a person equivalent to the man himself: because no one can give away something that does not belong to him. Now a prince's authority is not his own property—he is simply granted the use of it—since no prince can be the source of his authority. He may accept or resign the office

¹ Aristotle, *Prior Analytics*, I. 25.

² i.e. the Master of the Sentences, Peter Lombard (1100–60), in *Sententiae*, IV. Dist. 5. Dante has not grasped Peter's argument and the distinctions on which it rests.

but he cannot create another prince, because the creation of a prince does not lie within the power of the prince.

This being so, it is obvious that no prince can put anyone in place of himself who is in all things equivalent to himself. Therefore the objection carries no weight.

VIII

They also base their arguments on those celebrated words spoken by Christ to Peter: ‘And whatsoever you shall have bound on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever you shall have loosed on earth shall be loosed in heaven’;¹ from this text in Matthew and the parallel one in St. John² they assume that these words were spoken to all the apostles. Hence they argue that by God’s permission the successor of Peter may loose and bind in all matters; consequently, they say, he may dispense with the laws and decrees of the Empire and impose binding laws and decrees upon the temporal government. And their reasoning is justified if we grant the premiss.

I answer by making a distinction in the major premiss of the syllogism in question. They maintain that Peter’s successor can bind and loose all things: from this they conclude that he can bind and loose the authority and decrees of the Empire. I grant the minor but do not concede the major without a distinction. Thus I say that this universal sign ‘all’ (which is implied in the ‘whatsoever’) never extends beyond the scope of the terms it governs. For if I say ‘all animals run’, the ‘all’ extends to everything comprehended in the genus ‘animal’; however, if I say, ‘all men run’, then the universal sign only extends to what is comprehended in the term ‘man’; and if I say ‘all grammarians’ the extension is even more restricted.

This is why it is always essential to note the term whose extension is determined by the sign of universality; once the nature and limits of the term are known it becomes easy

¹ Matt. xvi. 19.

² John xx. 23.

to recognize its extension. If the 'whatsoever' in the statement 'whatsoever you shall bind' is taken as absolute, then my adversaries' statement would be correct; not only would he be able to do the things they claim, he would also be able to loose a woman from her marriage to one man and bind her in marriage to another whilst the first was still alive; and this is quite impossible for him. He would be able to absolve me even if I were not penitent; which even God himself cannot do. This being so, it is obvious that the extension of the term is not to be taken in an absolute sense but in a relative sense. So as to discover the power to which the extension is related we have only to examine what was granted to Peter and its implications. Now Christ says to Peter: 'I give to you the keys of the kingdom'; that is, 'I shall make you custodian of the kingdom of heaven'. He then adds, 'and whatsoever'; in other words, 'all that . . .', referring to 'all that pertains to this office is within your power of loosing and binding'. And so the universality referred to in the 'whatsoever' is restricted in extension to the office of keeping the keys of the heavenly kingdom. In that sense their statement is correct; but not in the absolute sense, as we have shown.

Therefore although I maintain that Peter's successor has the power to bind and loose in fulfilment of the office entrusted to Peter, it does not follow that he can bind and loose the decrees or laws of the Empire, as they assert (unless it could also be proved that this pertains to the office of key-bearer; that the contrary is true will be shown later).

IX

Again, they cite that sentence in Luke which is addressed by Peter to Christ: 'Behold, here are two swords',¹ and they say these two swords are to be understood as signifying the two kinds of government; and that Peter, by saying they were with him, meant that they belonged to him. From this

¹ Luke xxii. 38.

they conclude that authority over these two kinds of government rests with Peter's successor.

To this I reply by denying the allegory on which the argument is based. For they say that the two swords brought out by Peter symbolize the two kinds of government. This must simply be denied, firstly because Peter's reply ran counter to Christ's intentions, and secondly because it was Peter's habit to seize suddenly upon the superficial meaning of events.

Nor is it difficult to recognize that his reply was not in accord with Christ's intentions, if one weighs the previous words and the events that occasioned them. We must remember that the words were spoken on the day of the Last Supper (which is why Luke had begun his account: 'Now the day of unleavened bread was come on which the Paschal lamb has to be slain'¹); and during the supper Christ has foretold His approaching passion, by which it was necessary for Him to separate himself from His disciples. We must also notice that when those words were spoken all the twelve disciples were gathered together, since shortly after these words Luke says: 'And when the hour was come He reclined at table, and the twelve apostles with Him.'² From then the conversation proceeds until we come to the words: 'When I sent you forth without scrip, purse or sandals, did you ever lack anything?' And they said: 'Never.' So He continued: 'But now, whoever has a scrip let him take it with him, and his purse also; and whoever has no sword let him sell his cloak and buy one.' From which Christ's intention is plain; for He did not say 'get or even buy two swords' but 'twelve'—since He was speaking to the twelve disciples and telling those who did not have a sword to buy one, so that each might have one.

And He said this so as to warn them of the persecution and contempt they would have to face, as if to say: 'So long as I have been with you, you have been accepted; now you

¹ Luke xxii. 7.

² Luke xxii. 14.

shall be driven away. Therefore you ought to acquire things in this time of need which I once forbade you to have.' Therefore if Peter's reply to these words did bear the meaning put upon it by my adversaries it would not have accorded with Christ's intentions ; and Christ would have rebuked him for it as He did on many other occasions when Peter's answers were inappropriate. On this occasion, however, He did not do so but agreed with him, saying : 'That is sufficient', as if to say : 'I say this with a view to your needs ; but if there is not one for each of you, then two will be enough.'

The fact that Peter usually seized upon the superficial meaning of His words is proved by the sudden and thoughtless way he thrust himself forward ; he was moved not only, I believe, by the sincerity of his faith but also by his natural simplicity and purity. This forwardness of Peter's is recorded by all the Evangelists. Thus Matthew tells us that when Jesus asked His disciples, 'Who do you say that I am ?' Peter answered before all the others : 'Thou art the Christ, the son of the living God.' ¹ Again he describes how when Christ told His disciples that His time had come to go up to Jerusalem and suffer, Peter took Him aside and began to reprove Him, saying : 'Lord, be it far from Thee ; let this not happen to Thee' ; and turning to Peter, He rebuked him, saying : 'Get thee behind me, Satan.' ² He also records that on the Mount of the Transfiguration, in company with the two sons of Zebedee and before the face of Christ, Moses and Elias, Peter said : 'Lord, it is good for us to be here ; if Thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles, one for Thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.' ³ Furthermore, he tells us that when the disciples were in their boat during the night and Christ was walking upon the waters, Peter said : 'Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come to Thee upon the waters.' ⁴ Yet again he tells us how Christ predicted that

¹ Matt. xvi. 15-16.

² Matt. xvi. 21-23.

³ Matt. xvii. 3 ff.

⁴ Matt. xiv. 28.

His disciples would be scandalized, and Peter's reply: 'Although all shall be scandalized in Thee, I will never be scandalized'; and later: 'Yea, though I should die with Thee, I will not deny Thee.'¹ Mark also confirms this;² and Luke relates that just previous to the words about the sword which we have discussed, Peter said to Christ: 'Lord, I am ready to go to Thee, both into prison and unto death.'³ John describes how Christ proposed to wash Peter's feet, and how Peter said: 'Lord, dost Thou wash my feet?'; and later: 'Thou shalt never wash my feet.'⁴ John also says that he struck the servant of the high priest with his sword,⁵ and all the Evangelists agree upon this point.⁶ Again, he tells us that it was Peter who went straight into the tomb whilst the other disciple was hesitating at the entrance.⁷ He further describes how Jesus was standing on the shore after the Resurrection: 'When Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his coat about him (for he was naked) and cast himself into the sea.'⁸ Finally he records that when Peter saw John he said to Jesus: 'Lord, and what shall this man do?'⁹ It is useful to have compiled a list of these instances celebrating our archimandrite's naïvety, because they make it easy to see with what simplicity he was speaking in his answer to Christ about the two swords. So that if these words of Christ and Peter are to be taken in any figurative sense they do not support my opponents' case but must refer to that sword of which Matthew writes as follows: 'Do not think that I came to send peace upon earth; I came not to send peace, but the sword. For I came to set a man at variance against his father, etc.'¹⁰ This actually came to pass both in word and deed, which is why Luke says to Theophilus: 'These things Jesus began to do and teach.'¹¹ This is the sword that

¹ Matt. xxvi. 33-35.

² Mark xiv. 29 ff.

³ Luke xxii. 33.

⁴ John xiii. 6-8.

⁵ John xviii. 10.

⁶ Matt. xxvi. 51; Mark xiv. 47; Luke xxii. 50.

⁷ John xx. 4.

⁸ John xxi. 7.

⁹ John xxi. 21.

¹⁰ Matt. x. 34 ff.

¹¹ Acts i. 1.

Christ ordered them to buy, and to which Peter was referring when he replied that there were two of them. These two signify the deeds and the words that they were prepared to use in order to do what Christ said He had come to do by the sword, as has been said.

X

Furthermore they maintain that when the Emperor Constantine had been cleansed of leprosy by the intercession of Sylvester (the Supreme Pontiff at that time) he donated the very seat of Empire (i.e. Rome) to the Church, along with many other Imperial prerogatives. From this they argue that no-one henceforward may assume those prerogatives unless he receives them from the Church, to whom, in their opinion, they belong. Consequently it would truly follow that the one authority is derived from the other, as they wish to prove.

Now that we have stated and refuted those arguments which appear to be rooted in sacred Scripture, the next task is to state and refute those which are based upon Roman history and human reason. The first of these is the one we have just referred to, which is given the following syllogistic form : what belongs to the Church cannot be held by anyone except by the Church's permission (and this is conceded) ; the government of Rome belongs to the Church ; therefore it cannot be held by anyone except by the Church's permission ; and as proof for the minor they quote the statement about Constantine referred to above.

I deny this minor premiss and declare that their attempt to prove it fails completely ; because it did not fall within the power of Constantine to dispose of the Imperial prerogatives, nor within the Church's power to accept them. But since they persist in their opinion I will prove my point as follows : no one is permitted to do anything in virtue of the office bestowed upon him which is contrary to that office ; otherwise one and the same thing, in its very nature,

would be contrary to itself, which is impossible. But to divide the Empire is contrary to the office bestowed upon the Emperor, since it is his office to hold mankind in obedience to one will as that one will issues its commands and prohibitions; this may easily be seen from the first part of this treatise, therefore it is wrong to divide the Empire. So if it were true, as they maintain, that Constantine alienated from the Empire certain Imperial privileges, which passed to the Church's control, such an action would be equivalent to tearing that seamless garment which even those who pierced Christ, the very God, with the lance did not dare to divide.¹ Besides, just as the Church has its foundation so has the Empire. For the Church's foundation is Christ; hence the Apostle's words to the Corinthians: 'Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Christ Jesus.'² He is himself the rock on which the Church is built. But the Empire's foundation is human justice. Now I say that just as the Church is not allowed to act contrary to its foundation but must for ever rest upon that foundation, according to the phrase in the Canticle of Canticles, 'Who is this that cometh up from the desert, flowing with delights, leaning on her beloved? '³—similarly the Empire is not allowed to do anything contrary to human justice. But it would be contrary to human justice for the Empire to destroy itself; therefore the Empire is not allowed to destroy itself. Therefore since to divide the Empire would be equivalent to destroying it (undivided universal monarchy being the essence of the Empire) it is obvious that the person endowed with Imperial authority is not allowed to divide the Empire. It is equally obvious, then, from the preceding argument, that it is contrary to human justice to divide the Empire.

Again, all jurisdiction is prior to the judge who exercises it: since the judge is appointed for the sake of the jurisdiction and not vice versa. But the Empire is that jurisdiction which comprehends every temporal jurisdiction within its

¹ John xix. 23.

² Cor. iii. 11.

³ Canticle viii. 5.

scope; therefore it is prior to the judge exercising it, that is the Emperor, who is appointed precisely to serve it, and not vice versa. Clearly, then, the Emperor, as Emperor, cannot change it, since it provides him with his *raison d'être*. Now this is what I say: either he was the Emperor when he is said to have made the donation to the Church, or else he was not; if not, then it is self-evident that he could not transfer any Imperial power; if he was, then such a transfer would have been equally impossible to him as Emperor, because it would have meant a diminution of his jurisdiction. Furthermore, if one Emperor may cut off a portion of the Imperial jurisdiction, so may another, on the same ground. And since temporal jurisdiction is finite and everything finite may be reduced to nought by a finite process of subtraction, it would follow that the supreme jurisdiction can be eliminated entirely, which is absurd.

Again, since the person granting a thing is related to the person receiving it as agent to patient (according to the Philosopher in the fourth book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*¹) the conditions for the grant to be valid not only include a proper disposition on the part of the person making the grant but also on the part of the person receiving it; for it seems that an act can only be accomplished when the agent encounters a proper disposition in the patient. But the Church is in no sense properly disposed to receive temporal things, on account of the express prohibition recorded by Matthew: 'Possess not gold nor silver, nor money in your girdles, nor purse for your journey, etc.'² And although we find a slight modification of this precept in certain respects in Luke, still I have been unable to discover that permission to possess gold and silver was granted to the Church subsequent to that prohibition.³ This being so, even though we assume that Constantine on his side could make the donation, the act itself was impossible because the patient did not have

¹ *Nicomachean Ethics*, IV. 1.

² Matt. x. 9 ff.

³ Luke xxii. 36.

the proper disposition. It is clear, therefore, that the Church was no more able to accept it as a possession than the Emperor to make an outright grant of it. Nevertheless, the Emperor could grant the Church guardianship over one part or other of his patrimony so long as it was without prejudice to his supreme proprietorship, which is a unity admitting no division. Similarly the vicar of Christ may accept a grant, not as proprietor, but as administrator of the fruits for the benefit of the Church and the poor of Christ—as the Apostles are known to have done.

XI

Again, they say that Pope Adrian invoked the aid of Charlemagne for himself and the Church on account of the wrongs done by the Lombards during the reign of Desiderius, their king; and that Charlemagne received his Imperial office from the Pope despite the fact that the Emperor Michael was ruling in Constantinople.¹ Starting from this event they maintain that all the Roman Emperors since then have been the Church's protectors, and must be called to that office by the Church: this would indeed lead logically to that dependence which they seek to prove.

And I destroy their case by pointing out that what they are saying amounts to nothing whatsoever. Usurpation of a right does not establish a right. For if it did, then the authority of the Church could be shown to depend upon the Emperor, since the Emperor Otto restored Pope Leo, as

¹ At the beginning of the Pontificate of Adrian I (772-95) the Lombards were harrying Papal lands in Northern Italy; so Adrian called in Charlemagne to help him. In 774 Charlemagne defeated the Lombards at Pavia; and his alliance with the Papacy was hallowed by his coronation as Emperor at Rome in 800.

It was not Adrian, as Dante seems to think, but Pope Leo III (795-816) who crowned Charlemagne; furthermore the Empire at Constantinople in 800 was held by Irene (797-802) and not Michael (811-13).

well as deposing Benedict and subsequently carrying him off to Saxony.¹

XII

On the basis of reason they argue in the following way. They adopt a principle stated in the tenth book of the *Metaphysics*,² saying: all things of the same kind are reducible to one component which is regulative for all the things of that particular kind; but all men belong to the same kind; therefore they must be reduced to the one component which is regulative for all of them. And since the Supreme Pontiff and the Emperor are both men, if the preceding conclusion is correct it follows that they should be reduced to one regulative component, which is man. And since the Pope is not to be regulated by another the only remaining possibility is for the Emperor, along with all others, to be reduced to the Pope's rule and regulation. This is the conclusion they are aiming at.

In order to refute this argument I reply that when they say all things of the same kind should be reduced to the one component of the kind that is regulative for that kind, they are right; again they are right when they say all men belong to the same kind; likewise they rightly conclude from these propositions that all men should be reduced to the unit that is regulative for their kind. But when they apply this conclusion to the Pope and the Emperor they commit the accidental fallacy. In order to appreciate this one has simply to note that it is one thing to be a man and another thing to be Pope; and in the same way being a man and being Emperor are different things, just as being a man is different from being a father or a lord. In fact, man is man in virtue of a substantial form which sets him in a certain species and kind and brings him into the category of sub-

¹ Otto the Great restored Leo VIII in 964; in the same year he carried off Pope Benedict V to Saxony.

² *Metaphysics*, X. 1.

stance. But a father is such in virtue of an accidental form constituted by the relation that determines his place within a species and a kind and is based upon a certain kind of function in respect of something else, upon a relationship. Otherwise all aspects of the world could be reduced to the category of substance (since no accidental form exists in itself, but supposita a subsistent substance); and this is untrue. Since the Pope and Emperor, therefore, are what they are in virtue of certain relationships (i.e. in virtue of Papacy and Empire, the first of these relations coming within the scope of paternity, and the second within the scope of lordship) it is obvious that the Pope and the Emperor, as such, must come into the category of relation and consequently are reducible to something of that type. Thus I maintain that the regulative principle to which they are reducible, in so far as they are men, is different from that which applies to them as Pope and Emperor. For in so far as they are men they have to be reduced to the one who serves as a rule for all men: he is the best man, that is to say, the one who represents perfect unity within his kind, as may be learnt from the last book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.¹ But considered under the category of relation it is clear either that they mutually determine each other (if one is subordinate to the other, or if they share the same relation), or else they are reducible to a third form that unites them both. But it cannot be said that the one is subordinate to the other; because then each could be predicated of the other. But we do not say 'The Emperor is the Pope', nor vice versa; therefore this alternative is false. Nor can we say that they share the same relation, since the *raison d'être* of the Pope, as such, is different from that of the Emperor, as such. Therefore they must be reducible to some form that unites them both.

Consequently we must bear in mind that related things stand towards each other as does the one relation to the other.

¹ *Nicomachean Ethics*, X. 5.

So if Papacy and Empire, being relations of authority, are to be reduced to some unifying authoritative relation, from which they are diversely derived, then the Pope and the Emperor, in their relative aspects, must be reduced to that unifying form in which the authoritative relation is to be found free from partiality or diversity. And this will either be God, in whom every partial relation is perfectly integrated, or it will be some substance inferior to God in which the authoritative relation has become particularized at a lower level than that of absolute authority. So it is clear that the Pope and the Emperor, as men, are reducible to a common term, but as Pope and Emperor to a differentiating term.

Thus their argument from reason is refuted.

XIII

Having stated and exposed the errors on which most store is set by those who maintain that the authority of the Roman Emperor depends upon the Roman Pontiff, we must now apply ourselves to demonstrating the truth about the third issue that we set out to discuss at the beginning. This truth will emerge quite clearly if I demonstrate, by means of the principle of inquiry established previously, that the Imperial authority depends immediately upon the One who is the supreme source of all being, God. And this will be indirectly demonstrated if it is proved that it does not depend upon the authority of the Church (since no other is even suggested), and it will be directly demonstrated if it is proved to depend immediately upon God.

The proof that the Church's authority is not the cause of Imperial authority runs as follows. If one thing flourishes in all its power when some other thing does not even exist or enjoy power, then this second thing is not the cause of the first; but the Empire flourished in all its power at a time when the Church neither existed nor enjoyed power; therefore the Church is not the cause of the Empire's power; nor

of its authority (its authority and power being identical). Let A stand for the Church, and B for the Empire, and C the authority or power of the Empire ; if A is non-existent, and C is in B, it is impossible for A to be the cause of C's being in B, since it is impossible for the effect to precede the cause. Again, if A is inoperative, and C is in B, then A is necessarily not the cause of C's being in B, because an effect can only be produced as a result of preceding operation by the cause (I am referring particularly to the efficient cause ¹). The major premiss of this proof is evident in its terms ; the minor is confirmed by Christ and the Church. It is confirmed by Christ in His birth and His death, as we have previously shown. The Church confirms it by Paul's words in the Acts of the Apostles, when he says to Festus : 'I stand at the judgment-seat of Caesar, where I must be judged' ; ² and again when the very angel of God said to Paul a little later : 'Fear not, Paul. It is right for you to stand before Caesar' ; ³ once more, Paul later says to the Jews dwelling in Italy : 'Now when the Jews opposed me I was compelled to appeal to Caesar, not as having aught of which to accuse my nation, but that I might snatch my soul from death.' ⁴ And unless Caesar had not at that time had the authority to judge temporal affairs Christ would not have enjoined such belief ; nor would the Apostle who declared 'I desire to be released and be with Christ' ⁵ have appealed to an incompetent judge. Moreover, if Constantine had not possessed due authority he could not in justice have entrusted Imperial goods to the patronage of the Church in the way that he did ; and so the Church would be unjustly profiting by the donation, since we are told in Leviticus that God wishes our offerings to be spotless : 'Every offering

¹ Following Aristotle the scholastics divide causes into four kinds, i.e. formal, material, efficient and final. Cf. Aristotle, *Physics*, II. 3.

² Acts xxv. 10.

⁴ Acts xxviii. 19, and Ps. xxxii. 19.

³ Acts xxvii. 24.

⁵ Phil. i. 23.

which ye shall bring to the Lord shall be without leaven.'¹ And although this command seems specifically addressed to those offering the sacrifice, nevertheless by implication it clearly includes those receiving it. For it is foolish to imagine that God wishes anything to be received that He will not allow to be offered, since in the same book He commands the Levites: 'Pollute not your souls, nor touch ought of theirs, lest ye be unclean.'² But to say that the Church does usurp the patrimony entrusted to her in this way would be ludicrous; therefore the hypothesis from which it was inferred was false.

XIV

Furthermore, if the Church had power to confer authority upon the Roman Prince it would either have derived the power from God, or from itself, or from some emperor, or from the universal consent of men, or at least from the majority of them; there is no other channel through which this power could have flowed into the Church. But it does not derive it from any of these; therefore it does not possess the power in question.

Clearly it does not derive the power from any of these sources, as we shall now show. If it had received the power from God this would have been as a result either of divine law or of natural law, because whatever is derived from nature is derived from God; though the converse is not true. But it was not as a result of natural law, because nature does not impose its law except by its own natural causes, and it cannot be maintained that God lacks control over secondary causes when He brings something into being without using them. Therefore since the Church is not caused by nature, but is the work of God—who says, 'On this rock I will build my Church',³ and again, 'I have finished the work Thou gavest me to do'⁴—it is obvious

¹ Lev. ii. 11.

² Lev. xi. 43.

³ Matt. xvi. 18.

⁴ John xvii. 4.

that nature did not impose its law upon the Church. But neither was it by means of the divine law : for the whole of the divine law is enshrined in the Old and New Testaments, and I have looked in vain within those shrines for any command to priests of either the old or the new dispensation to take care of temporal affairs. On the contrary, I find that the priests of the old dispensation were specifically excluded from temporal affairs by God's commandments to Moses ;¹ and those of the new dispensation by Christ's commands to his disciples.² Now they could not possibly be excluded in this way if the authority of the temporal power flowed from the priesthood, since at the very least the priesthood would have to exercise care in the act of conferring authority, and would then be constantly concerned to see that the person authorized to use it was not deviating from the path of righteousness. That it is not the source of its own power is easily shown. There is nothing that can give what it does not possess ; which means that before an agent can produce what it intends it must itself actually possess what it intends (as we learn from the *Metaphysics*³). But it is obvious that if the Church gave itself the power in question then it did not have it before giving it ; and so it would have given itself something which it did not possess—which is impossible. Also it has been adequately shown above that the Church did not receive such power from any emperor. And who could still imagine that it received the power by consent of all, or of a majority, when not only everyone in Africa and Asia but even most inhabitants of Europe revolt at the suggestion ? It is wearisome, indeed, to develop arguments in support of a perfectly obvious truth.

XV

Again, whatsoever is contrary to the nature of a thing is not to be numbered amongst its powers, since the powers

¹ Num. xviii. 20.

² e.g. Matt. x. 9.

³ *Metaphysics*, IX. 8.

appropriate to each thing flow from its nature and are adapted to its proper end. But the power to confer authority over our mortal condition is contrary to the nature of the Church; therefore it is not to be numbered amongst its powers.

The minor premiss becomes evident as soon as we realize that the nature of the Church is also its form; for although 'nature' is often used to refer to both matter and form, strictly speaking it refers to the form, as the *Physics* show.¹ But the form of the Church is none other than the life of Christ, including both His deeds and His words. Now His life was the model and exemplar for the Church militant, for its pastors in particular, but above all for the chief pastor whose office is to feed the lambs and the sheep. This is the reason for those words in John by which He hands on the form of His life: 'I have given you an example that as I have done to you so should ye also do';² and in the same Gospel we read what He said specifically to Peter after bestowing upon him the office of pastor: 'Peter, follow thou me.'³ But in the presence of Pilate Christ expressly renounced the kind of power we are discussing: 'My kingdom,' he said, 'is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would fight that I should not be given over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from here.'⁴ Which must not be taken to mean that Christ, who is God, is not lord of this kingdom (because the Psalmist says, 'For the sea is His, and He made it, and His hands established the dry land'⁵), but it means that, as the model for the Church, He took no care for this kingdom. It is as if a golden seal were to say of itself, 'I am not the standard for any class of being'; this statement would not be valid in the sense that the seal is of gold and provides the standard for the class of metals; yet it is valid in the sense that the seal

¹ *Physics*, II. 1.

² John xiii. 15.

³ John xxi. 19.

⁴ John xviii. 36.

⁵ Ps. xciv. 5.

is a sign which may be received generally through impression. It belongs to the form of the Church, therefore, to say the same as it feels ; to say or feel the opposite would be to deny its form or nature (for they are identical). From which we can conclude that the power of conferring temporal authority is contrary to the nature of the Church ; for when an opinion or statement contains contraries this is because the subject of the opinion or statement itself contains contraries, just as the truth or falsity of a statement is due either to the existence or non-existence of the thing in question, as we are taught in the *Categories*.¹

Thus we have quite adequately shown by the incongruity that their arguments involve that the authority of the Empire in no way depends upon the Church.

XVI

In the preceding chapter it has been shown, by bringing out the incongruity implicit in the argument, that the authority of the Empire is not derived from the authority of the Supreme Pontiff. But it has not been completely proved that the Imperial authority is derived immediately from God unless the consequence of our argument is stated. The consequence is that if he does not depend upon the vicar of God, then he must depend upon God himself. So in order to present a conclusive demonstration of the proposition we need to prove directly that the Emperor, or monarch of the world, stands in immediate relationship to the prince of the world, who is God.

In order to grasp this it must be realized that man is unique amongst all beings in linking corruptible things with those that are incorruptible ; hence the philosophers rightly liken him to the line of the horizon which is the meeting-place of two hemispheres. For if man is considered according to his essential constituents, that is, his soul and his body,

¹ Aristotle, *Categories*, X. Dante is probably relying on Boethius, commentary.

he is corruptible in respect of one, the body, but incorruptible in respect of the other, the soul. Thus in the second book of the *De Anima* the Philosopher rightly says of the incorruptible constituent of man: 'and this alone, being eternal, is capable of separating itself from the corruptible world.'¹ Therefore man is, so to say, a middle-term between corruptible and incorruptible things, and since every middle-term participates in the nature of the extremes which it unites, man must participate in these two natures. And since every nature is ordered towards some ultimate goal, it follows that man's ultimate goal is twofold—because since man is the only being sharing in both corruptibility and incorruptibility he is the only being who is ordered towards two ultimate goals. One of these constitutes his goal in so far as he is corruptible and the other in so far as he is incorruptible.

Unerring Providence has therefore set man to attain two goals: the first is happiness in this life, which consists in the exercise of his own powers and is typified by the earthly paradise; the second is the happiness of eternal life, which consists in the enjoyment of the divine countenance (which man cannot attain to of his own power but only by the aid of divine illumination) and is typified by the heavenly paradise. These two sorts of happiness are attained by diverse means, just as one reaches different conclusions by different means. We attain to the first by means of philosophical teaching, being faithful to it by exercising our moral and intellectual virtues.² We arrive at the second by means of spiritual teaching (which transcends human reason), in so far as we exercise the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity. These conclusions, and the means towards them, are revealed to us, on the one hand by human reason (in the light of which

¹ *De Anima*, II. 2.

² The principal moral virtues are prudence, temperance, fortitude and justice. The intellectual virtues are science and wisdom (speculative), and prudence and art (practical).

the philosophers have made one human situation perfectly clear), and on the other hand by the Holy Spirit, who has revealed the supernatural truth necessary for our salvation by means of the prophets and sacred writers, and through the Son of God, who is co-eternal with the Spirit, Jesus Christ, and through Christ's disciples. Nevertheless human cupidity would fling such aids aside if men, like horses stampeding to satisfy their bestiality,¹ were not held to the right path by the bit and the rein. This explains why two guides have been appointed for man to lead him to his twofold goal: there is the Supreme Pontiff who is to lead mankind to eternal life in accordance with revelation; and there is the Emperor who, in accordance with philosophical teaching, is to lead mankind to temporal happiness. None would reach this harbour—or, at least, few would do so, and only with the greatest difficulty—unless the waves of alluring cupidity were assuaged and mankind were freed from them so as to rest in the tranquillity of peace; and this is the task to which that protector of the world must devote his energies who is called the Roman Prince. His office is to provide freedom and peace for men as they pass through the testing-time of this world. Furthermore, since the condition of this world has to harmonize with the movements of the heavens, it is necessary for the protector of this world to receive knowledge of the appropriate conditions directly from the One who sees the whole course of the heavens at a glance; only then can he apply the principles of liberty and peace at the appropriate times and places. But this One is none other than He who fore-ordained the condition of the heavens, providentially intended by Him to hold all things together in harmony. If this is so, then God alone elects and confirms the Emperor, since God has no superior. Consequently it can be seen that the title of elector should not be accorded either to those now described as electors, nor to any others; properly speaking their office is to proclaim

¹ Ps. xxxi. 9.

what God has providentially decided. Failure to realize this sometimes results in discord amongst those privileged to make this proclamation, because all—or some of them—are so befogged by the mists of greed that they fail to perceive the obvious decision of divine providence. Thus it is obvious that the temporal Monarch receives his authority directly, and without intermediary, from the Source of all authority, which Source (though utterly indivisible in the citadel of its simplicity) flows out into manifold channels through its abounding goodness.

And now it seems to me that I have achieved the target I aimed at. For I have sifted out the truth about the three questions at issue : whether the office of Monarch is essential for the well-being of the world : whether it was by right that the Roman people obtained the Empire ; and last, but not least, whether the Monarch's authority derives directly from God or comes through some intermediary. Yet the truth upon this last issue is not to be narrowly interpreted as excluding the Roman Prince from all subordination to the Roman Pontiff, since in a certain fashion our temporal happiness is subordinate to our eternal happiness. Caesar, therefore, is obliged to observe that reverence towards Peter which a first-born son owes to his father ; so that when he is enlightened by the light of paternal grace he may the more powerfully enlighten the world, at the head of which he has been placed by the One who alone is ruler of all things spiritual and temporal.

THREE
POLITICAL LETTERS

*The usual numbering of the thirteen letters
ascribed to Dante, used in Dantis Alagherii
Epistolae ed. Paget Toynbee (Oxford, 1920),
and in the Oxford Opere di Dante Alighieri
of Moore and Toynbee, has been retained.*

LETTER V

To the Kings of Italy and the Senators of the holy Mother City, also to the Dukes, Marquises, Counts and Peoples of Italy, to all and to each, a humble Italian, Dante Alagheri, a Florentine in undeserved exile, greeting and a prayer for peace.

1. ‘Behold now is the acceptable time’,¹ when there arise signs of consolation and of peace. For a new day dawns with Morning flaming in the East, and already dissolves the darkness of our prolonged calamity. Now the breezes of the dawn freshen, the face of the sky blushes to the lips and confirms the hopes of the nations by its cloudless smile. We, too, who have spent a long night in the wilderness, shall see the expected joy, since Hyperion, the Sun of peace, will arise, and justice, which, when deprived of sunlight, grows dim like the jewel Heliotrope, will revive as soon as he has shot his first ray.

‘All that hunger and thirst shall be filled’² in the light of his rays, and ‘they that love iniquity’³ shall be confounded before the splendour of his face. For the strong ‘lion of the tribe of Judah’⁴ ‘hath his ears attent unto mercy’,⁵ and pitying the lament of our universal captivity, has raised up another Moses, who will catch his people away from the oppressions of the Egyptians, and lead them to ‘a land flowing with milk and honey’.⁶

¹ II Cor. vi. 2.

² Matt. v. 6.

³ Ps. x. 6 (A.V. xi. 5).

⁴ Rev. v. 5.

⁵ II Chron. vii. 15.

⁶ Deut. vi. 3.

2. Rejoice already, Italy, you who are now to be pitied even by Saracens, you who will at once be looked upon with envy throughout the globe, since your Bridegroom, the Consolation of the world and 'the glory of your people',¹ the most merciful Henry, the Consecrated, Augustus and Caesar, is hastening to his wedding. Dry your tears, most fair lady, and wipe away the marks of grief: for he is near who will deliver you from the prison of the ungodly, who, 'putting' the workers of malice 'to the edge of the sword',² will destroy them, and 'will let out his vineyard to such other husbandmen'³ as shall render him 'the fruit of justice'⁴ 'in the time of harvest'.⁵

3. But will he have mercy on no one? Surely he will pardon all who sue for mercy, since he is Caesar, and it is from the Fount of Pity that his sovereign greatness flows. His verdict eschews all severity, and he always stops short of the mean in punishment, but oversteps it in reward. Will he therefore applaud the audacities of wicked men and propose a toast to the adventures of presumption? Far be it from him, since he is Augustus; and if he is Augustus, shall he not take vengeance on the crimes of backsliders and pursue them as far as Thessaly, that is, to a defeat as decisive as Pharsalia?⁶

4. Lay aside, you tribe of Lombards, the savagery that you brought with you, and make way before the survivors of the line of Troy and of the Latins,⁷ for fear that the celestial eagle at his approach, when he swoops like a thunderbolt, may find his nestlings outcast and the brood's eyrie usurped by paltry ravens. Come, see to it, you offspring of Scandinavia,⁸ that, so far as you may, you welcome

¹ Luke ii. 32.

² Num. xxi. 24 et passim.

³ Matt. xxi. 41.

⁴ Amos vi. 13.

⁵ Matt. xiii. 30.

⁶ Where Caesar defeated Pompey in 48 B.C.

⁷ cf. *Mon.* II. xi.

⁸ For the Scandinavian origin of the Lombards, cf. Paulus Diaconus, *Historia Longobardorum* I. 1.

his presence, whose approach you have every reason to fear. Do not be led astray by the delusive promptings of avarice, which with its strange siren sweetness closes the wakeful eye of Reason.

Be first to court his presence by an acknowledgment of your submission to him, and be glad to sing a litany of penance before him,¹ in the conviction that he who 'resists authority, rebels against the ordinance of God',² and he that opposes the divine ordinance kicks against a will that is allied to the omnipotent will; and 'it is hard to kick against the pricks'.³

5. But do you, who groan under oppression, 'lift up your hearts, because your salvation is near'.⁴ Take⁵ the rake of an honest humility and break up the parched clods of your impetuosity, roll flat the field of your mind, for fear that the rain from heaven may come too soon for your sowing of the seed and fall from the sky to no purpose.⁶ Let not the grace of God rebound from off you like any raindrop from a stone, but like a fruitful valley conceive and burgeon into greenery, a greenery that will bear the fruit of true peace: and when your land is gay with the spring green, the new tenant of the Roman estate will with more love and confidence yoke his oxen to his plough, that is, his designs to their execution. Refrain, refrain from now onwards, best-beloved, who have suffered wrong with me, so that the shepherd of Hector's⁷ line may see in you the sheep of his fold. Although temporal chastisement is entrusted to him by Heaven, yet he delights to amend his household, and even more to forgive it, so that he may diffuse the fragrance of God's goodness, from whom the powers of Peter and of Caesar are independently derived as from one point.⁸

6. Accordingly, if you disencumber yourselves of the

¹ cf. Ps. xciv. (xcv.) 2.

² Rom. xiii. 2; cf. Eph. vii. 7.

³ Acts ix. 5.

⁴ Luke xxi. 28; Rom. xiii. 11.

⁵ cf. Eph. vi. 17.

⁶ cf. II Cor. vi. 1.

⁷ Trojan and so Roman.

⁸ cf. *Mon. III.*

ancient guilt,¹ throwing it on its back like a snake, as you well may, and turning it against itself, both parties² among you may take this as evidence that peace is in store for each one of you, and both may now enjoy a foretaste of an unlooked-for joy. Therefore awake, all you inhabitants of Italy, and stand up to greet your King, since you are privileged to be not only subjects of his supremacy but free-men under his guidance.

7. I urge you not only to rise in his honour but to stand in awe of his presence, you who drink his rivers³ and sail his seas. The sands of the shores and the heights of the Alps on which you set foot are his. His is the law, no other's, by whose bond you enjoy all public rights and own all private property. 'Deceive not yourselves',⁴ like the ignorant, as though in a dream, saying in your hearts 'we have no master'.⁵ Everything under the sky is his garden and his lake: for 'the sea is God's and He made it Himself and His hands formed the dry land'.⁶ Hence it is proved by the evidence of miracles that God foreordained the Roman Emperor,⁷ and the Church avows that He afterwards confirmed it by word of His Word.

8. Now if from the beginning of the world 'the invisible perfections of God have been inferred from His visible creation'⁸ and if we 'reach the less known by way of the better known',⁹ it certainly advances human understanding to take the movement of the heavens as proof of the existence and will of a prime Mover, and this providential harmony will readily reveal itself even to the superficial observer. For if we review the past from the first minute spark of this great fire, I mean from the moment when the Phrygians

¹ Disobedience, the cause of the Fall.

² The rebels and the exiles.

³ Prov. v. 15.

⁴ Jer. xxxvii. 9.

⁵ I Kings xxii. 17; Ps. xiii. 1; lii. 1.

⁶ Ps. xciv. 5; cf. Gen. i. 9.

⁷ cf. *Mon.* II. iv.

⁸ Rom. i. 20; cf. *Mon.* II. ii.

⁹ Aristotle, *Physics*, I. 1.

refused hospitality to the Argives,¹ and if we find time to survey the history of the world down to Octavian's triumphs, we shall see that some of these events have been quite beyond the range of human effort and that God has worked some effect through men, just as he can create new heavens.² For we are not always the agents, rather we are from time to time the instruments of God, and the human will, in its inherent natural liberty,³ is exempted from lower influences⁴ and is directly acted upon by the divine will and so often unconsciously subserves it.

9. Now if these arguments, offered as first principles to decide the question at issue, are not sufficient, who will not be forced into agreement with me by the conclusion drawn from such premisses, namely that for twelve years⁵ the whole world was wrapped in peace? This, as by accomplished fact, reveals the face of its Reasoner, the Son of God. When He was made Man for the revelation of the Spirit and was preaching the Gospel on earth, He divided the whole world between Himself and Caesar as though to distinguish the two Kingdoms, by saying 'render unto each the things that are his'.⁶

10. But if an obstinate mind does not yet assent to the truth, let it weigh the words of Christ when He was already bound: for when Pilate urged his authority against Him, Our Light declared that the function, which he boasted of there exercising by Caesar's delegated authority, came from

¹ When Laomedon, King of Troy, excluded the Argonauts from his harbour at Rhoeteum on the Hellespont; in revenge Hercules sacked Troy, and Laomedon's daughter Hesione was raped, for which the reprisal was the rape of Helen, the cause of the Trojan War: Aeneas escaped from the sack of Troy to found in Latium the mother-city of Rome.

² Isa. lxv. 17; II Pet. iii. 13.

³ cf. *Mon.* I. xii.

⁴ i.e. the influence of the planetary spheres.

⁵ cf. Orosius, *Hist. adv. Paganos*, VI. 22 (1 B.C.).

⁶ Matt. xxii. 21.

above.¹ Do not therefore 'walk as other Gentiles walk in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened',² but open the eyes of your mind and see that the Lord of heaven and earth has appointed a King for us. This is he whom Peter, the Vicar of Christ, admonishes us to honour,³ whom Clement, the present successor of Peter, irradiates with the light of the Apostolic blessing,⁴ so that the splendour of the lesser luminary may lend its light where the spiritual ray is not sufficient.

¹ John xix. 10-11.

² Eph. iv. 17-18.

³ I Pet. ii. 17.

⁴ Pope Clement V's Encyclical *Exultat in Gloria* of September 1, 1310.

LETTER VI

DANTE ALAGHERI, a Florentine in undeserved exile, to the arrant scoundrels within the city.

1. The merciful providence of the everlasting King, who does not abandon in contempt our world below while maintaining the heavens above by his goodness, has entrusted to the Holy Roman Empire the governance of human affairs so that mankind might have peace under the cloudless sky that such a protection affords and that everywhere, in accord with the dictates of nature, the organized life of society may be upheld.¹ Although this is proved by Holy Scripture and is warranted by the ancient world² on the basis of reason alone, it is nevertheless no slight confirmation of the truth that, when the throne of Augustus is vacant, the whole world loses its way, the pilot and oarsmen in the ship of St. Peter fall asleep, and Italy, unhappy and forsaken, abandoned to private caprice and deprived of all public direction, drifts³ in such a battering from wind and wave as words could not express, and even the Italians themselves in their misery can scarcely measure it by their tears. Let everyone, therefore, who by blind presumption is puffed up to resist this unmistakable evidence of God's will, now betray himself by turning pale before the imminent approach of the stern Judge's assize, even if the sword of Him who says 'vengeance is mine'⁴ has not yet flashed from heaven to strike.

2. But you have been lured, all too apt pupils in crime, by the monstrous maw of your greed into every trespass

¹ cf. *Mon.* I. v; II. i.

² cf. *Mon.* II. iv.

³ cf. *Mon.* I. xvi.

⁴ Deut. xxxii. 35.

against the laws of God and man : are you not haunted by dread of the second death,¹ since you, first and alone in your abhorrence of the discipline of liberty, have raged² against the majesty of the Roman Emperor, the King of the world and the lieutenant of God, and, on the plea of prescriptive right, have denied your duty of proper obedience and preferred to work yourselves into a frenzy of rebellion? Are you unaware, crazy and contrary³ as you are, that Public Right is not to be criticized on the ground of prescription but expires only with the end of time itself?⁴ Surely the venerable precepts of our Roman Law aver, and human reason, after prolonged reflection, concurs, that sovereignty, however long neglected, admits neither obsolescence, diminution, nor question.

For whatever tends to the advantage of all cannot perish or be even impaired without damage to all. This is contrary to the intention of God and of nature, and mankind would agree in utterly rejecting it.

Why are you stirred by this will o' the wisp to abandon the Holy Empire and, like builders of a second tower of Babel, to embark on new forms of state so that the Florentine sovereignty⁵ should be co-ordinate with the Roman? Why do you not choose to feel the same envy of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, and to duplicate the sun, the celestial symbol of the Papacy, at the same time as the moon of the Empire?⁶ But if reflection on your monstrous designs does not give you pause, let this at least strike terror into your hardened hearts, that the penalty of your crime is your deprivation, not merely of wisdom, but even of the beginning of wisdom.⁷ For there is no more alarming symptom in a sinner than his doing as he likes without shame and without

¹ Rev. xxi. 8. ² Ps. ii. 1. Cf. *Mon.* II. i. ³ cf. I Pet. ii. 18.

⁴ cf. Virgil, *Aeneid*, I, 278 : 'nec tempora pono'.

⁵ *Civilitas*. Cf. *Mon.* I. ii.

⁶ cf. Eph. v. 10; *Mon.* III. iv; *Purg.* XVI. 107-8.

⁷ Ps. cx. 10.

the fear of God. This is of course the punishment which so often strikes down the wicked man, that on his deathbed he takes no account of what he is, as in life he took no account of God.

3. But if your insolent arrogance has indeed so far cut you off from the dew of heaven's grace, like the mountains of Gilboa,¹ that resistance to the decree of the Eternal Senate has given you no qualms and you are not even afraid of your own lack of fear, will you really be able to silence that other fear, the merely human and secular fear of ruin, when you are hurried to the inevitable shipwreck of your proud race and of what will cost you many tears, your snatching² at the prize of absolute sovereignty? You trust, doubtless, that you can defend yourselves somehow, because you have a contemptible ring of ramparts³? What a union of hearts is yours—for evildoing only, how you are blinded by your incredible ambition! What help will it be to have built your ring of ramparts and fortified yourselves with bulwarks and battlements, when there swoops upon you the eagle in the field of gold,⁴ which, soaring now over Pyrenees, now over Caucasus, now over Atlas,⁵ once looked down upon vast expanses of sea in its flight, aided and supported by the hosts of heaven? What indeed, when you stand dumbfounded, you most miserable of men, before the Emperor at your doors to check the delirium of Italy? The inordinate hope that you vainly cherish will certainly not be furthered by this rebellion of yours, but this barring of the just king's way will be fuel to the flame of his coming, and the mercy that always accompanies his army will take wing in indignation. Your self-styled defence of the threshold

¹ II Sam. i. 21.

² Phil. ii. 6.

³ The fortifications that Florence hastily built in the previous winter, 1310–11 (Villani, *Istorie Fiorentine*, ix. 10).

⁴ The Imperial standard was an eagle sable on a field or. Cf. *Purg.* X. 80–1.

⁵ i.e. the western, eastern and southern limits of the civilized world.

of false liberty will throw you down into the penitentiary of real slavery. For we cannot help believing that sometimes by the irony of God's judgment the means whereby the sinner plans to evade his deserts are made only to hurry him the more fatally to meet them; and the man who consciously and deliberately has defied the will of God is, without his knowledge and against his will, subserving it.

4. To your sorrow you will see your palaces, which you have not raised with prudence to meet your needs but have thoughtlessly enlarged for your pleasures, fallen, since no walls of a revived Troy encircle them, fallen under the battering-ram or consumed by fire. You will see your populace, now a raging mob, disorganized and divided against itself, part for, part against you, soon united against you in howls of fury, since a starving mob can know no fear.¹ You will see with remorse your churches, now thronged every day by crowds of your ladies, pillaged, and your children doomed to pay for their fathers' sins² in bewilderment and ignorance. And if my prophetic soul³ is not deceived in delivering a message brought home to me by unmistakable omens as well as by incontrovertible arguments, your small remnant, when the greater part has perished by slaughter or been taken prisoner, will witness with tears, before it passes into exile, the final delivery of your city, worn out with prolonged grief, into the hands of strangers. In short, the disasters which that glorious city of Saguntum⁴ endured in its loyalty for liberty's sake will be shamefully visited on your treachery to enslave you.

5. Nor may you take courage from the unexpected success of Parma: under pressure of famine, 'that evil counsellor',⁵

¹ cf. Lucan, *Pharsalia*, III. 58: 'nescit plebes ieiuna timere'.

² cf. Jer. xxxi. 29-30; Ezek. xviii. 2; *Paradiso* VI. 109.

³ cf. Virgil, *Aeneid*, X. 843: 'praesaga mali mens'.

⁴ cf. St. Augustine *de Civ. Dei* III. 20. Saguntum was besieged by Hannibal (219-8 B.C.).

⁵ *Aeneid*, VI. 276.

her citizens whispered to each other, 'let us rather rush into the midst of battle and be killed',¹ and broke into Caesar's camp, when Caesar was away. For although they won a victory over Victoria,² they too none the less earned thereby woe upon woe unforgettably. But reflect on the lightning strokes of Frederick I; be warned by the example of Milan as well as of Spoleto,³ since the thought of their perverse oversight linked so closely with their overthrow will give you no stomach for the fight, but strike a chill into your too expansive hopes and contract with fear your too sanguine hearts.

You, the most empty-headed of all the Tuscans, crazy by nature and crazy by corruption, in your ignorance you neither care nor conceive that in the eyes of the fully fledged⁴ the feet of your warped minds go astray in the darkness of night. For the fully fledged, the 'undefiled in the way'⁵ (as the Psalmist has it), see you as though you stood at the gates of a prison driving off anyone who takes pity on you, for fear that he might perhaps free you from your imprisonment, bound hand and foot as you are. Nor do you notice in your blindness that greed is your master, luring you on with venomous whispers and curbing you with insubstantial threats, bringing you into 'captivity to the law of sin'⁶ and forbidding obedience to the most sacred laws, which are made in the image of natural law. Now the observance of these laws, if whole-hearted and spontaneous, can not only be shown to be no slavery, but much rather reveals itself to a penetrating mind as the essence of perfect liberty.

For what is liberty but the unhampered translation of will into act? and the law paves the way to act for her votaries.

¹ *Aeneid*, II. 353.

² In 1248 the Emperor Frederick II besieged Parma and built a fortress called Victoria against it; the Parmigiani captured it when he was away hunting (Villani, VI. 34).

³ Frederick I Barbarossa destroyed Milan in 1157 and Spoleto in 1152 (Villani, V. i).

⁴ Prov. i. 17. Cf. *Purg.* XXXI. 61-3.

⁵ Ps. cxviii. 1.

⁶ Rom. vii. 23.

If therefore only those who give willing obedience to law are free, what will you call yourselves who, behind the screen of devotion to liberty, break every law to conspire against the lawgiver?

6. You pitiable offshoot of Fiesole, barbarians now due for a second chastisement, does this foretaste not strike panic enough into your hearts? I am sure that you tremble in your waking hours, for all that you put a show of hope on your faces and in your lying claims, and that you often wake out of dreams in alarm at the future foreshadowed in them, or perhaps at the review of what you were plotting the day before. But if in your well-founded alarm you regret your madness yet without remorse,¹ these further points remain to be brought home to you, so that the streams of fear and remorse may join to form the bitter river of repentance, that this our Elect, our triumphant Henry, who carries the burden of the Roman Commonwealth, thirsting not for his own personal interests, but for the general good of the world, has undertaken for our sakes his high task, sharing our pains by his own free will, as though to him, after Christ, the prophet Isaiah had pointed the finger of prophecy, when he foretold what the Spirit of God revealed: 'Surely he hath himself borne our griefs and himself carried our sorrows.'² So you see, if you will consent not to deny it, that the time is at hand for your bitterest repentance of your rash presumption. But belated repentance of this kind will not be productive of pardon, much rather will it be the opening scene of your well-timed punishment. This is so, because 'the sinner is smitten so that he shall surely die'³ without appeal.

Written on the 31st of March on the borders of Tuscany below the source of Arno,⁴ in the first year of the Emperor Henry's most auspicious entry into Italy.

¹ cf. II Cor. vii. 9-10. ² Isa. liii. 4. ³ I Sam. xiv. 39.

⁴ Dante was at Poppi in the Casentino, the upper valley of the Arno.

LETTER VII

To the most glorious and most fortunate Conqueror and sole Lord, the Lord Henry, by divine providence King of the Romans and ever Augustus, his most devoted servants, Dante Alagheri, a Florentine in undeserved exile, and all Tuscans everywhere who desire peace, a kiss on the ground before his feet.

By the bequest of God's immeasurable love, the inheritance of peace has been left to us,¹ so that its wonderful sweetness might soften the hardships of our present state, in the Church Militant,² and that in the enjoyment of it we might earn the delights of our eternal Home, the Church Triumphant. But the envy of our ancient and implacable adversary,³ plotting as always in secret against the weal of mankind, has induced some of their own free will to renounce their inheritance, and thus, in the absence of our guardian, has mercilessly stripped it from the rest of us against our wills. Thus we have long sat by the rivers of confusion,⁴ yea, wept our hearts out, and have been ceaselessly entreating the protection of our rightful King, to sweep away the minions of the cruel tyrant⁵ and to restore us to the justice that is ours. And when you, the successor of Caesar and of Augustus, lightly stepped over the range of Apennine, and brought back the venerable standards of the

¹ John xiv. 27.

² cf. Job vii. 1 (in Vulgate version).

³ The devil; cf. I Peter v. 8; *Mon. II. x.* For envy, cf. *Wisdom ii. 24.*

⁴ Ps. cxxxvi. 1.

⁵ Florence.

Capitol, at once our long-drawn sighs were stopped, and the floods of our tears dried up, and, as though the Hyperion we longed for were rising, a new hope of better times shone in the eyes of Italy. Then most of us, forestalling our longings in our joy, chanted with Virgil of the Golden Age and the return of the Virgin (Justice).¹

2. But since our Sun—whether it be the fervour of our longing or the appearance of truth that suggests the thought—is either believed to be pausing or suspected of retreat, as if a second Joshua² or son of Amoz³ were giving the order, we are driven by our uncertainty to doubt and to break out into the words of the Forerunner thus: ‘Art thou he that should come or look we for another?’⁴ And although prolonged thirst grows frantic and habitually involves in doubt what seems guaranteed by its nearness, we none the less believe and hope in you, proclaiming you to be the minister of God, the son of the Church and the promoter of Rome’s glory. For I too, who write this letter as much on my own behalf as on others’, saw and heard in you all that Imperial majesty should be, the height of loving-kindness and of mercy, at the time when my hands were laid on your feet and my lips paid their due of homage. Then my spirit rejoiced within me, when I said to myself in silence: ‘Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who taketh away the sins of the world.’⁵

3. But we ask in wonder why such dull sloth retards you, when you have long been victorious in the Po valley, that you abandon, overlook and neglect Tuscany as if you imagined the Imperial rights under your protection to be hedged in by the frontiers of Liguria, and took no account, so we must suspect, of the fact that the glorious power of

¹ Virgil, *Ecl.* IV. 6; cf. *Mon.* I. xi.

² Josh. x. 12–13.

³ i.e. Isaiah (II Kings xx. 1 and 11).

⁴ Matt. xi. 3; Luke vii. 19.

⁵ John i. 29.

the Romans is not cramped within the limits¹ of Italy, nor even within the triangular outline of Europe.² For although it has suffered violence³ and withdrawn its governance into narrow compass, yet by inviolable right it reaches out on every side to the waves of Amphitrite and hardly consents to be encircled by the ineffectual stream of Ocean.⁴ For it has been written for our instruction :

‘Trojan Caesar will be born from a noble line, to bound his empire by the Ocean, his glory by high heaven.’⁵

And when ‘there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed’⁶ (as the lowing of our ox, the evangelist Luke,⁷ touched by the coal of unperishable fire, records), if the decree had not gone forth from the Court of the most just of governments, the only-begotten Son of God,⁸ made Man in order to acknowledge⁹ His subjection to the edict so far as concerned His assumed nature, would by no means have chosen that moment to be born of the Virgin.¹⁰

For He whom it ‘became to fulfil all righteousness’ would not have recommended an unjust action to us by His example.¹¹

4. Shame on you, then, whom all the world awaits, if you become entangled so long in a narrow plot of the world; and let it not slip from your majesty’s survey that the Tuscan tyranny¹² takes comfort from your procrastination and is reassured, and, by its daily fomenting of the pride of evildoers, goes from strength to strength and piles audacity on

¹ cf. Virgil, *Aeneid*, I. 278.

² Europe was represented as roughly a triangle; cf. Albertus Magnus, *De Natura Locorum*, III. 7.

³ cf. Matt. xi. 12.

⁴ cf. *Mon.* I. xi.

⁵ *Aeneid*, I. 286-7.

⁶ Luke ii. 1.

⁷ St. Luke is figured as an ox on the basis of Ezek. i. 10 and Rev. iv. 7.

⁸ John iii. 16, 18.

⁹ Luke ii. 3, 5.

¹⁰ cf. *Mon.* II. xii.

¹¹ Matt. iii. 15.

¹² Florence.

audacity. Let Curio's famous appeal to Caesar ring in your ears again :

'While their factions waver with no core of strength, strike hard: to halt once ready is to court defeat. By delay you pay only the more dearly for the same task and the same trials.'¹

Let the Roman Anubis' (Mercury's) famous rebuke to Aeneas ring again in your ears :

'If you are unmoved by the glory of such exploits, and if for your own fame's sake you shoulder no effort, think of Ascanius, growing to manhood, Iulus your hope and heir: the inheritance you owe him is an Italian kingdom, the soil of Rome.'²

5. For your first-born son John, himself a king³ of your kingly line, whom the next generation of mankind will look to after the day that now dawns has set,⁴ is to us a second Ascanius who, following in the footsteps of his great sire, shall wreak his wrath like a lion on any new Turnus and shall be gentle as a lamb to the successors of Latinus. Let our anointed King in his high devices take heed lest the judgment of heaven sharpen once more those words of Samuel: 'When thou wast little in thine own sight, wast thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel, and the Lord anointed thee King over Israel? And the Lord sent thee on a journey, and said, Go, and utterly destroy the sinners the Amalekites.'⁵ For you too have been consecrated King, to strike down Amalek and not spare Agag,⁶ to avenge Him who sent you on the 'brutal people' and their 'premature celebration' (for such are said to be the meanings of Amalek and Agag).

¹ Lucan, *Pharsalia*, I. 280-2; cf. *Inf. XXVIII.* 97-102.

² *Aeneid*, IV. 272-6.

³ John of Luxemburg, born 1295, King of Bohemia by marriage to Elisabeth, daughter of Wenceslas IV: he was killed at Crécy in 1346.

⁴ i.e. on Henry VII's death.

⁵ I Sam. xv. 17-18.

⁶ I Sam. xv. 33.

6. Do you linger on from winter into spring¹ at Milan and plan to extirpate the pestilent hydra by successive decapitations? But if you had reflected on the exploits of the glorious Hercules, you would recognize that you were fooled like him, since the venomous beast gained from loss when each head cut off sprouted into more, until the hero went straight to attack the very source of life.² For to kill a tree the mere lopping of branches does not serve; they form new branches with redoubled virulence so long as the roots remain undamaged to supply them with sap. Sole ruler of the world, what do you reckon that you will have achieved when you have bowed the head of rebellious Cremona³ in the dust? Will not an unpredicted madness then come to a head at Brescia⁴ or Pavia?⁵ Surely it will, and even when it has been scourged into subsidence, another will presently swell up at Vercelli or Bergamo or somewhere else, until the cause of this exuberance is rooted out. When the root of this monstrous perversion is extracted, the prickly branches will wither with the trunk.

7. Can it escape you, most excellent Prince, can you fail to detect from the watch-tower of your supreme Highness, where that stinking vixen in her lair laughs at the huntsmen? Well, the culprit does not drink from the swift-flowing Po, nor from your Tiber, but the reek of her maw still pollutes the headlong course of the Arno, and Florence—perhaps you did not know it?—is the name of this noisome monster. She is the viper that turns against her mother's vitals;⁶ she

¹ Henry VII remained at Milan from December 23 to April 19.

² The story of Hercules and the Lernaean hydra was known to Dante from Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, IX. 69-74.

³ Cremona, incited by Florence, rebelled against Henry in February and was quickly reduced in May.

⁴ Brescia followed the example of Cremona in March. It took Henry four months, from May to September, to reduce it.

⁵ Pavia was pacified by Henry on his way from Brescia (October 2) to Genoa (October 21).

⁶ cf. *Aeneid*, VI. 833.

the sick ewe that taints her master's flock with plague ; she the incestuous and unnatural Myrrha¹ in heat to enjoy the embraces of her father Cinyras : she Virgil's passionate Amata² who rejected the fore-ordained marriage and did not hesitate to set at her side the son-in-law whom destiny denied her, and madly challenged him to fight and in the end expiated her rash crimes by hanging herself in a noose. With truly viperine savagery she strives to rend her mother when she has sharpened the horns of rebellion against Rome, that made her 'in her image, after her likeness'.³ She reeks with a truly blighting virulence as her slaver taints the air, and the neighbouring flocks all unaware catch the infection,⁴ while by the lure of perfidious caresses and deceits she decoys her neighbours to her side and bewitches them once decoyed. Yes, she is truly passionate for the embraces of her father, when with shameless importunity she exerts herself to breach the agreement between you and the Supreme Pontiff, who is the father of fathers. Truly she resists the ordinance of God⁵ by worshipping the idol of her own will, in that she spurns her rightful King and in her madness unblushingly barters for licence to do evil rights not her own with a king not her own.⁶ But let the mad woman look to the noose in which she is entangling herself. For often one is 'given over to a reprobate mind' to do in reprobation 'unnatural things'.⁷ Such acts of suicide may be wrong, but

¹ Myrrha's passion for her father, Cinyras, King of Cyprus, was known to Dante from Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, X. 298-502 (cf. *Inf.* XXX. 25-41).

² Amata, wife of Latinus, King of Latium, wished her daughter Lavinia to marry Turnus, King of the Rutulians (*Aeneid*, VII. 344-5). The marriage with Aeneas was ordered by the oracle of Faunus (VII. 96-101). Amata hanged herself when she thought Turnus had been killed (XII. 593-607).

³ Gen. i. 26.

⁴ cf. Virgil, *Ecl.* I. 50.

⁵ Rom. xiii. 2; cf. Eph. v. 4.

⁶ King Robert of Naples.

⁷ Rom. i. 28.

obviously there is nothing wrong with them viewed as punishments.

8. Up then and break with all delays, new son of Jesse, take courage from the eyes of God, the Lord of Hosts, in whose presence you act, and lay low this Goliath in the sling of your wisdom and in the stone of your strength¹ : for at his fall night and the shadow of fear shall cover the camp of the Philistines : the Philistines shall flee and Israel shall be delivered. Then our inheritance,² whose loss we lament without cease, shall be restored to us in full ; and as we now groan in our exile at Babylon when we remember the holy city of Jerusalem, we shall then be citizens again and draw breath in peace and look back in joy at the dolorous waters of Confusion.

Written in Tuscany below the source of Arno on the 17th of April, in the first year of the Emperor Henry's most auspicious entry into Italy.

¹ I Sam. xvii. 49-50.

² i.e. peace, as in the opening sentence of the letter.

A NOTE ON THE CHRONOLOGY OF DANTE'S POLITICAL WORKS

A NOTE on the question of the dates of Dante's works and on the reason for including with the *Monarchy* the three Political Letters written on behalf of Henry VII may be useful. Two of these Letters are dated precisely by Dante himself, and afford a basis for dating the *Monarchy*, since in doctrine they differ only slightly from the *Monarchy* and are close to it in argument and wording, and at the same time show a particular application of the general and abstract doctrine of the *Monarchy* to the contemporary situation created by Henry's arrival in Italy, and voice more freely the intense passion which Dante brought to the issue.

Some have wished to date the *Monarchy* even to the years after Henry's death, and to use the *Comedy* to illustrate the doctrines of the *Monarchy*. In part they relied on the words in *Mon.* I. xii, 'sicut in Paradiso Comedie iam dixi', referring to the 'greatest gift conferred on human nature by God', namely freedom of the will (cf. *Par.* V, 19 ff., 'lo maggior don che Dio per sua larghezza / fesse creando. . . / . . . fu de la volontà la libertate'), but these words are now generally excluded from the text as a later interpolation, since they do not occur in all the manuscripts and are out of tone with the style of the *Monarchy*. It is now generally agreed that Boccaccio, *Della origine vita costumi e studii di D.A.*, c. 16, was right to connect the *Monarchy* with Henry VII's coming to Italy, and Professor D'Entrèves' arguments are here accepted that the *Monarchy* represents a stage in

Dante's thought before the final stage which the *Comedy* presents (and with the *Comedy*, Letter VIII to the Cardinals, where Dante's concern has clearly been transferred from the Empire to the Papacy).

Letter VII to Henry VII gives one striking example of the change that occurred in Dante between writing it and the *Comedy*, and, therefore, in view of the close connection of *Monarchy* and Letters V, VI and VII, presumably of the change of view which lies between *Monarchy* and *Comedy* also. This is the quotation of Curio's appeal to Julius Caesar, from Lucan's *Pharsalia*, to cross the Rubicon and attack his native city Rome: in the Letter Dante makes Lucan's words his own to urge Henry speedily to attack Florence. But in *Inf.* XXVIII. 94-102, Dante condemns Curio as a fomentor of sedition for this same advice to Caesar. Now he can scarcely have written *Inf.* XXVIII before Letter VII, and if he wrote it after, he must be condemning himself for inciting Henry against his native city, Florence. If so, he had repented of the part he had played on behalf of Henry against Florence and was now viewing it in a very different light, as though he saw the point of view of those inside Florence when they condemned him as a traitor to perpetual exile a few months after Letter VI. Letter VI provides another example of such a drastic reassessment of the mood from which the *Monarchy* and the three Letters issued. In it Dante implies that he is one of the 'undefiled in the way' and 'fully fledged' (pennati). This boast is turned directly against Dante by Beatrice in *Purg.* XXXI. 61-3, where she speaks ironically of the nets which the 'fully fledged' (pennuti) know how to avoid, but which Dante, no chicken in years, has entangled himself in. It must, however, be admitted that the threats of immediate punishment in Letter VI, 4, against Florence seem to be renewed against the 'shameless women of Florence' in *Purg.* XXIII, 106-11, with repetition of the phrase 'si praesaga mens mea non fallitur' in the Italian form, 'se l'anteveder qui non

m' inganna'. But, if one must find a contemporary reference in this passage, Dante probably alludes to the battle of Montecatini in 1315 when Uguccione della Faggiola heavily defeated the Florentines.

The actual composition of the *Monarchy* may be put either a little earlier or a little later than the three Letters, since the differences between it and them may be accounted for as well by difference of purpose as by different stages of development in Dante's thought. But in any case, it must have been finished before June 1312, when Pope Clement V ordered Henry VII to suspend operations against King Robert of Naples, thus going back on his earlier encouragement to Henry to enter Italy and go to Rome for his coronation. This reversal of Clement's policy, under pressure from King Philippe le Bel of France, is the 'deception of Henry by the Gascon' to which Dante refers bitterly in *Par. XVIII*, 82: 'ma pria che 'l Guasco l'alto Arrigo inganni'. In the *Monarchy* and Letters there is no trace of such resentment against the Papacy, which is addressed with respectful disagreement in *Mon.* III. iii and xvi, and quoted as supporting Henry in Letters V, 10, and VII, 7. (Cf. Paul Renucci, *Dante disciple et juge du monde gréco-latin* (Clermont-Ferrand, 1954), pp. 110-13, 183, n. 634.) Clement is condemned by Dante already in *Inf. XIX*, 82 ff., and his death (April 20, 1314) is prophesied'. The passage must therefore be subsequent to Clement's death and so provides the supporters of the late date for the beginning of the *Comedy* with one of their strongest arguments. In the light of this argument from the 'inganno del Guasco', Signor Vinay's dating of the *Monarchy* to the period from Spring 1312 to August 1313, when Henry VII died, seems somewhat late. The coalition, moreover, of kings and peoples in Italy against Henry, which Vinay finds referred to as a present fact in *Mon.* II. i, need not be dated as late as 1312: it was already active in 1311.

The argument that *Mon.* II. i refers to the Emperor as

‘uncto’, the anointed, has been used to date it. If Dante had Henry VII in mind and not merely the general practice of anointing an Emperor at his coronation, we need not even so date the *Monarchy* after Henry’s coronation in Rome on June 29, 1312, because he had already been anointed, certainly at his coronation at Milan on January 6, 1311, if not also at Aix-la-Chapelle exactly two years earlier, on January 6, 1309. Letter VII, 5, quotes I Sam. xv. 17, ‘unxitque te dominus in regem Israel’, with reference to Henry after the Milanese and before the Roman coronation. As in the *Monarchy* the Electors are ‘the messengers of God’s will’, Dante may perhaps think of the Emperor as spiritually anointed by God’s election of him through the Electors before any actual ceremony of anointing.

Dante’s meditation on the doctrine of Empire certainly began even before Henry’s election as Emperor, namely in the fourth and last book of the *Convivio*, which, completed probably before the end of 1308, shows Dante thinking out the nature of Imperial authority, apparently for the first time. Dante abandoned the *Convivio*, which he had planned to write in fifteen books; he also abandoned unfinished the *De Vulgari Eloquentia*. It seems likely that he left them to study for and plan the *Monarchy*, when he heard of Henry’s election and intention of coming to Italy. The most generally accepted view, however, is that he dropped the *Convivio* in order to begin the *Comedy*, in 1308 or 1309. The suggestion that Dante changed his opinions during the composition of the *Comedy* with changing circumstances (e.g. the *Inferno* before Henry’s coming, the *Purgatorio* during his period in Italy and the *Paradiso* after his death) is to be rejected because it compromises the visible unity of plan in the *Comedy*, and because the writing of the three Letters seems inconceivable at the same time as the *Comedy* or even in a pause between two parts of the *Comedy*. Cosmo’s suggestion that the prophetic tone of the Letters is to be accounted for by the self-confidence which

Dante derived from writing the *Comedy* ignores the difference between their exclusive and almost hysterical political passion and the political detachment (e.g. condemnation of both Ghibellines and Guelfs in *Par.* VI. 103-8) of a man devoting himself to a supernatural vocation, the writing of an immortal poem which demanded ten years of concentrated effort.

The date of the *Comedy* and the relation of its teaching about the Empire to that of the *Monarchy* is too complex and controversial a question to be more than stated here. A late date after the *Monarchy* and three Letters is here assumed, but not necessarily after Henry's death. Letter VI would lead us to expect Dante's presence at the siege of Florence by Henry in September 1312. We know from Leonardo Bruni that he was not there, and it may be that he had already withdrawn to write the *Comedy*. Many of the doctrines of the *Monarchy* certainly reappear in the *Comedy*, and are even developed (e.g. the 'two Suns' in *Purg.* XVI, 107, are to be compared with *Mon.* III. iv; Letter V, 10; and Letter VI, 2. The Emperor as the Sun appears already in Letter V, 1, and Letter VII, 1 and 2). But those who argue for a difference of attitude and date between *Monarchy* and *Comedy* point especially to *Inf.* II, where the Roman Empire is no longer an institution co-ordinate with the Roman Church, but is emphatically subordinated to it.

If this suggested chronology is accepted, Letters V, VI and VII are necessary for the understanding of the *Monarchy*, whereas Letter VIII (to the Italian Cardinals in conclave after Clement's death) belongs to the stage of the *Comedy* and is therefore excluded from this selection, despite its great interest.

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